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St. Francis of Assisi

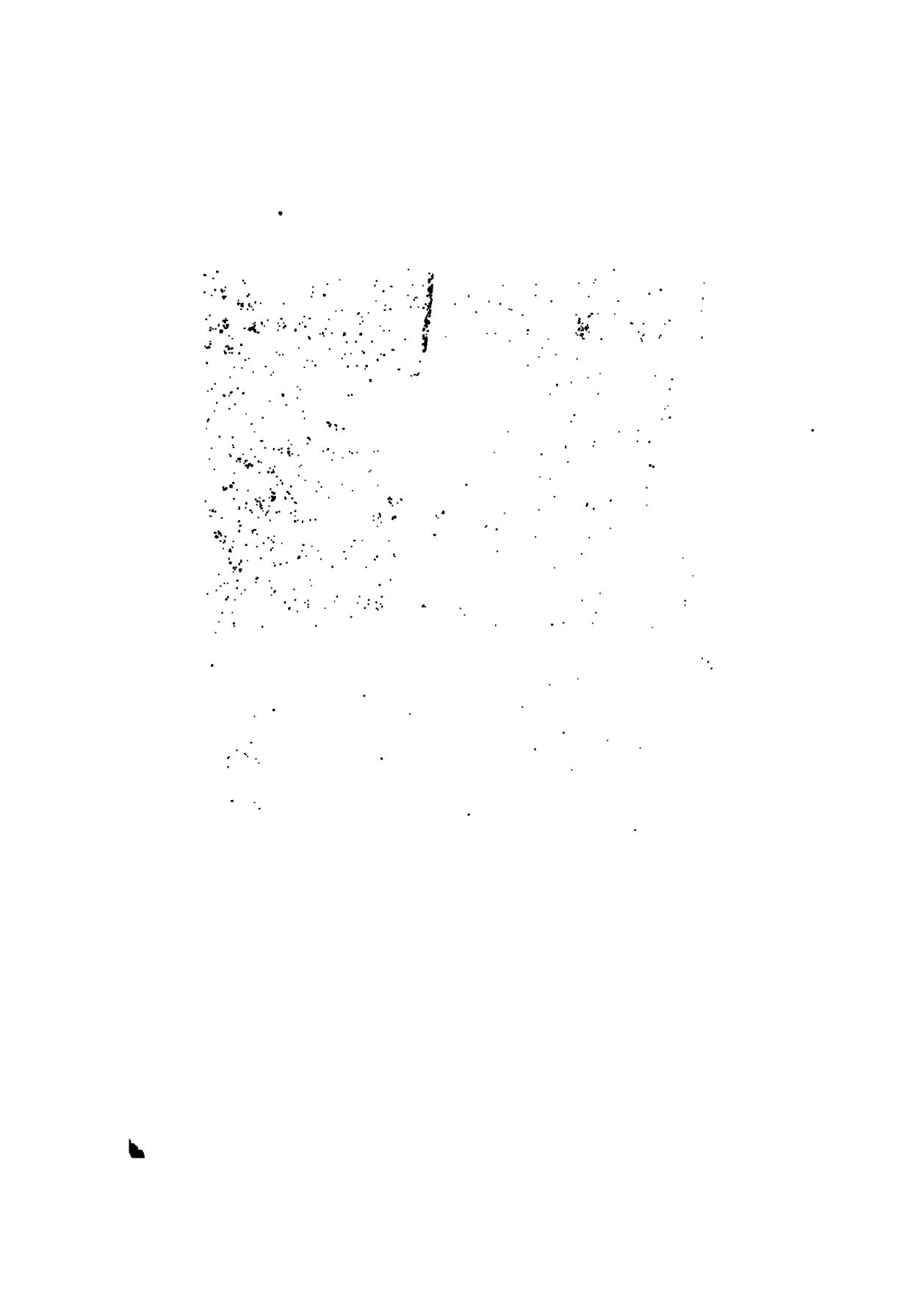
ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI



Mr. Edmund G. Ross

H. Freeman & Son.





ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

HIS TIMES LIFE AND WORK

Lectures Delivered in Substance in the Ladye Chapel
of Worcester Cathedral in the Lent of 1896

BY

W. J. KNOX LITTLE M.A.

CANON RESIDENTIARY OF WORCESTER AND VICAR OF HOAR CROSS

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I dedicate this volume
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WITH HOPE AND PRAYER FOR GRACE
FOR HIM AND OTHERS
TO FOLLOW UNDER WHOLLY DIFFERENT CONDITIONS
IN THE MAIN AND DEEPEST THINGS
THE NOBLE EXAMPLE
OF
A HOLY LIFE

11-54

P R E F A C E

THE present work has its origin in lectures delivered by me in the Ladye Chapel of Worcester Cathedral, on some week days in the Lent of last year. These have since been enlarged and corrected, but the book bears, I fear, the inevitable marks of its first form, in the way of some repetitions and insufficient fulness on certain points. However, such as it is, I hope it may help to make clearer a true view of a great life. The subject has interested me for many years, and I have studied everything, mediæval or modern, which has come within my reach relating to it. I have depended upon original authorities, and my judgment—*quantum valeat*—is independently formed from them.

THE COLLEGE, WORCESTER,
September 4, 1897.

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CHAPTER I

THE VALUE OF A STUDY OF ST. FRANCIS

THE lives of the Saints are of high value as a spiritual study. Such things may be treated mainly as history. In turning our attention to them, it will, I need hardly say, be necessary to keep strictly to history; for truth is, and it alone can be, the foundation for an edifying study. There is no possibility of real and permanent edification from what is not based upon truth. Such lives, however, may also be examined philosophically. The student of human nature cannot fail to be interested in the lives, actions, motives, tendencies of remarkable men. This is a scientific interest—right and useful so far as it goes, and especially in harmony with the temper of our times. There is, however, another, perhaps a nobler, method of examining the lives of eminent servants of God. We may treat them devotionally. This includes the others. It must be based upon really historical grounds; it must call into play the philosophical faculty of discriminating, of comparing things and noticing differences, but it ought to add to these an illumination and a glow. After all, it is only the eye of love, directed by philosophical accuracy, and using the light of historical truth, which can ever hope to see the deepest things as they are. “He who wills to do His will”—*i.e.*, he who

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truly loves God—"shall know." And then such a study as this ought to have a strictly practical purpose ; it ought to help us in falling in with God's will, and gathering some fresh vigour for our own souls to the glory of God.

I

Premising this, it is worth our while to dwell upon the special spiritual value of the attentive study of the life of any great saint, especially in the less remote ages of the Church's history. . "Things seen are greater than things heard." In such lives truth is not merely written, it is shown. At the best of times it is not easy to realise the truth of things ; even when we know that there is such truth, we are helped by the study of the actual lives of those who have lived the truth, to bring it home to ourselves. The strange and sacred and lofty sayings of our Lord in the Gospels are wont to pass across our minds as sound and nothing more until we see them acted out, in ways most marvellous, and with a literalness which is startling, in the lives of men like, yet so unlike, ourselves.

Then again, we see—if one may say so reverently—an idea of God's own, well carried out. God is a great artist ; He works at man. Unlike the sculptor who manipulates the marble, or the painter who works on the canvas, His material—man—is not unable to resist. He works lovingly and skilfully, but he requires the co-operation of the object of His effort. This shows us the moral value of human biography and of the study of human character. The saints are those who have most perfectly answered to God's call and the action of His grace, and

so each represents some ideal in the Eternal Mind, carried out, as far as can be in this life, to approximate perfection. A saint has been called "the best of his kind." He is the highest example we know of, of some special thought of God, he exhibits in life some of those lines of perfection, all of which meet in Christ.

In view of this, there are some special advantages in dwelling on such a saint as St. Francis. We Englishmen have drifted unconsciously into the habit of half believing that the grace of God is confined to the New Testament. Here in England most people of any religious feeling will agree that St. Paul, St. John, St. Peter were saints, that God could use them as His special messengers, and employ them as means for advancing His kingdom, and exercising His (as we call them) miraculous powers. With saints in other times it is quite another question. We have an irrational and illogical and unphilosophical idea that miracles, apart from the New Testament, cannot be true, and that great sanctity can nowhere else be found but among the immediate followers of our Lord. It is not unimportant to disabuse our minds of this baseless notion, because by doing so, we learn to open our hearts to God's grace and teaching, and to remember that He is the same God now as ever, and, if anything, *more* powerful in action since the Church, wide and far, has received, in increasing degree, the life of the second Adam.

And further, attention to the life of a great saint opens to us a world of pathetic interest and striking beauty. Glorious things lie around us in the spiritual world if we have eyes to see. This present world, however, is close and strong and pressing, and the spiritual eye is clouded by its dust. Now and again we are awakened and startled

to find what is the real beauty of goodness. We measure things by the low standards of the customary and the commonplace, until there flashes upon us the high standard of the saints. In some slight measure to realise the greatness and beauty of a true servant of God, is to make us ashamed of our earthly views and self-seeking ways, and often merely conventional forms of religion.

And more than that : it is often from the study of such characters that we learn how to interpret ourselves to ourselves, and rightly to direct our aims. Before each soul among us lies eternity. Overpowering and soul-subduing are its possibilities. Around us are the things of time. Innumerable are our changing moods and feelings as we are acted upon by such facts. When we look closely at a great life we learn the need of loyalty to the Unseen. We are helped to look with penetrating glance beyond the shadows, and to have some genuine sense of the imperial power of truth, of the soundness of duty, of the solemnity of our destiny. We are comforted, strengthened, guided by the thought that men's lives are made for doing and suffering so as to form character and please God, and that our supreme calling is to do God's will, to bear nobly and humbly what He lays upon us, and to enter into and imitate and reproduce in life His sublime charity

II

We do well also to remember that there are special points of interest, peculiar to himself, which recommend to us the study of the life of St. Francis of Assisi.

(1) He is a thoroughly representative character. He

lived in a transition period, and he had completely caught the spirit of the age. The age was one of constant war, unsettlement, and trouble, and at the same time two facts are particularly prominent :

(a) There was a growing effort, especially in Italy and France, for commerce. Francis' own father was a not unimportant merchant, and he was but one of many who traded with France. Side by side with this there were very deep poverty and great suffering amongst the poor. If the middle class was beginning to be called into existence, the poor were still the large majority representing extreme misery. Francis lived to teach men the responsibility of those who possess wealth, and also the blessing belonging to poverty nobly borne. To this question we shall have, of course, to return more particularly again.

(b) It was the age of chivalry and poetry. In France, in Germany, in Sicily, and among the smaller Italian States there was a growing enthusiasm for the poetry of the time. Displays of chivalry were everywhere. The jongleurs, singers, *improvvisatori*, were welcomed by the people, by all classes. They sang of love and courage and noble deeds, of the legends of Arthur and Charlemagne. Whatever dark side there was in all this—as in all human things—there was a bright side. They were pioneers of progress ; they roused enthusiasm ; they lifted men out of the commonplace into an ideal world, and awaked many of the young to an ambition to

" Do noble things, not dream them all day long."

For poetry, when society is young, is not merely a source of pleasure ; it is a power for elevating and purifying the

moral nature. It has been truly pointed out* that four of the greatest troubadours, Bernard de Ventadour, Cadenet, Raimbaud de Vaqueras, Pierre Vidal, visited Italy at a time when Francis was young, and, by their stay there, gave a considerable impetus to the taste of the time. Francis not only threw himself, as we shall see, with characteristic energy into this movement in his early youth, but the movement affected him. His chivalrous devotion to God, his pure and lofty poetic feeling—affected by his age—acted in turn upon it, and moved men in the highest of all matters, in religion, because he touched the quick of his century. He was a man of the time.

(2) Francis is a remarkable figure also as a great reformer. The feudal system was then in full force in Europe. Land could only be held by a system of graduated subordination. Freedom, consequently, was scarcely known; wars and quarrels were numerous, and the people who might be inclined to peace were dragged perforce into the quarrels of their superiors. The yoke of feudalism sat heavily on the people. In Italy in some respects it was heavier than in France, for feudalism in Italy came from Germany, and feudal oppression was weightier in Germany then, and for long after, than in France. But already resistance showed itself in Italy. The serfs were denominated *Minori* in Italy and especially in Umbria. Gradually they loosened the yoke. They were persevering in commercial enterprise and efforts of industry. They acquired some wealth. Then they united together and resisted oppression.

Many centuries were to elapse before men realised the fact that people did not exist for the benefit of govern-

* *Bibliothèque de l' École des Chartes*, tom. iv. p. 30.

ments, but governments for the benefit of the people ; more still before it was fully felt that the people had a right to govern themselves in any well-ordered State. Long reaches of time were to pass before the principles which now guide civilised communities were to have a hold upon men generally, before it would be felt that nations and races were powers to be taken into account, and that individual liberty is a necessary condition of well-being and development. Such principles have to be learned by some men still. Fallen nature is apt to recur to the forms which are attractive to human selfishness, and even where—as for the most part in the western nations—such principles are generally accepted, there is a danger, from desire for power and pride of place or wealth, that they may be often violated. Still such principles are now generally accepted and, broadly speaking, acted upon.

Not so in St. Francis' days either in Church or State. Reforms have seldom come from the higher clergy. Where bishops have been reformers they have usually been swept into a current, often against their wills. They have, not unnaturally, been embodiments of principles of stability, rather than of reform. In the twelfth century bishops and abbots were themselves great lords with multitudes of vassals, to the serious injury of their spiritual usefulness. Here was a stereotyped system of oppression. There was, on the one hand, poverty and suffering, on the other hand, wealth and selfishness. The feudal system had done its work in checking anarchy, but it had introduced vast worldliness into the Church. A worldly spirit had come from great power, great dignity, great wealth. This led to scandals. Men's minds had revolted against it. Efforts had been made. St. Bernard had warned and

threatened, and had set the example of an effort to return to Christian simplicity of life and conduct. But he passed away, affecting only a comparatively small number. The community of devout men called *Humiliants* was formed near Milan to foster the same spirit, but their influence was local rather than world-wide. As early as the earliest days of the century, Arnold of Brescia had moved men, especially in Lombardy, by his somewhat extreme denunciations of riches, particularly among the clergy. The "Poor men of Lyons," or Waldenses, took the same line and moved men's hearts, though alas ! they fell into exaggeration and religious error. The Albigenses or *Cathari* gained great popularity by their bold attack upon luxury and worldliness in the Church. They got a strong grip both in France, Germany, and Italy, but unfortunately, like many socialistic reformers, they ran into violence and extremes and then into deadly Manichæan heresy. Attempts such as these were made. They showed the reality of the evil and the need of reform. But they failed in great measure from want of force or want of balance.

It was otherwise with St. Francis. He set himself to correct the terrible evils before his eyes. He succeeded beyond imagination because of his method and his spirit. Some men seeing a state of things around them which needs reform, allow themselves to fret and fume, to be irritated and angry at all that they find threatening or baffling in the facts and conditions of their life. They are impatient. They waste their energies in scorn and temper. They often lose thereby the opportunity of doing much good, by their irritability and headstrong indignation, even though it be just, and against what is wrong. There is another way. It was the way of

Francis. He had boundless patience, boundless self-command, inflexible purpose. He loved God as revealed in Christ Jesus, with a tender, deep, and passionate emotion. In consequence, he loved his fellow creatures. He embraced what may now appear an extreme form of humiliation and poverty ; but it was probably what was needed by his age. By his gentleness, courage, thoroughness of example, still more than by his genius, he alleviated the hard lot of the oppressed, and exercised a vast influence in undermining the evil principles which made that lot unbearable. He was a great social reformer. To this again we must return more particularly. And no less was he a religious revivalist. When men talk of "the Ages of Faith," they forget the deepening and spreading infidelity in Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Beside the constant danger to faith to be found in the corrupt heart of man and the self-sufficiency so dear to his fallen nature, there were other reasons. One is to be found in the nearer intercourse with the East, arising from the Crusades, and consequently the slackening of moral ties ; another in the dissensions of the Schools, where, in some instances, divine truth came to be handled intellectually alone, and without the reverent and spiritual temper necessary in touching the deep things of revelation, and maintained by the great and devout masters of theology. One way and another, practical irreligiousness based upon secret unbelief had laid hold on the unsettled society of the time. The movement of St. Francis was a strong blow struck for the Christian religion. The great feudal nobles, the men of the town as well as the suffering poor, wakened up to feel that the Christianity which produced such a life and such teaching, was still the religion by which men might well live and die.

It will be necessary afterwards to draw attention, in some slight degree, to the benefits bestowed by his work on our own country, and generally on civil society, by increasing in men's minds a respect for justice and a love of peace : we shall have, in considering his career, to remember, in due course, the greatness of his influence upon literature and art, but here and now it is well to dwell upon one other reason for giving our best attention to his life and work besides those already mentioned.

(3) For St. Francis may well be studied because of an invaluable heritage he has bestowed upon the Christian Church in what may be called "the Franciscan spirit." Christianity is so large a thing that in it are included many forms of thought, and many expressions of beauty. Christians, and especially saintly Christians, have consequently had special lines of devotion. Different parts of God's great work for his creatures have made appeal to different characters and moulds of mind. It is not that great and saintly men have lost sight of the broad and necessary truths of the Faith, but that some of those truths have deeply and directly touched them in a special degree, and formed their form of devotion. When we remember this, we see at once the meaning of "the Franciscan spirit." To some it may fairly seem the most perfect representation in poor humanity ever known of that wonderful vision of beauty and goodness which the Apostle calls "the mind of Christ." God's grace acts upon original character. In Francis that character is very marked. We cannot study his life with any care without being impressed with certain facts about him. He was by nature, as a mere lad, gifted with indomitable courage. He had to the end that sweet and deep simplicity and truth which, even when men have it young, is so often blurred

and corrupted by the world. In his gayest days of worldly popularity, when "in the swim"—as we should say—with his light-hearted, thoughtless companions, he was never carried off his feet by it. He was never a victim to conventionality. He showed that extraordinary courage and simplicity which alone can withstand the allurements of a strong though unreal "world." This is to be noted. In those years of solemn changes, when men pass from childhood to manhood, how often, alas! here is the point of failure. Before now, anxious and older guides have had to note, with tears in their hearts, how the bright boy who left them courageous and with a noble simplicity, has returned from school—or, still more, from the university—a sad reproduction of the *blase* man of the world; all the real courage and winning transparency of character shadowed, if not gone, by submission to the imperious foolishness of an insolent and low-minded "world." In his trial—and it is one of the greatest, especially to one so winning, so fascinating as he was—Francis stood his ground. For besides, in him (when once really convinced) there was—a fine inheritance, in part, from his father—an inflexible purpose. Once truly set upon an object which commended itself as worthy, no power could break that iron will.

Men of strong will, however, are often severe, inconsiderate, masterful, hectoring. Side by side with all this, there was a vein of sunshine—that is the only way to describe it—which ran through his entire life and work. He had a horror of sadness, as a real enemy to good, although never was a soul more filled with penitential sorrow. He was bright as a spring morning where the sun rises above the mountains without a fleck of cloud. There was a sweet amiability about him which attracted

his young companions in "the Courts of Love" at Assisi, and made him a power for purity and chivalry long before his conversion. He was—we feel it as we read his biographies—utterly sincere. No sort of pretence could find a place in this strong, sunny nature. Then there was his instinct for poetry, his love of music, his high thoughts about common things. He was intensely human: loving nature, loving his fellow creatures, gracious and courteous and bright, so that all men who knew him in his early days, and before God's finger touched him for his higher calling, felt the spell of that sweet, strong, bright personality—never leading downwards, always helping men to put their feet on the track of the dawn.

When divine grace touched such a character in a special way, the result was sure to be of singular loveliness. Such a man, under the influence of grace, could be trusted to do nothing by halves, and to do nothing with the unbalanced temper of ordinary men. And so it was. Once turned to God, he was turned with his whole soul. He loved God with passionate intensity. He realised, as man hardly realised before, the meaning, the sorrow, the awfulness, the tenderness of the Cross of Christ. A deep, personal, tender, absolute devotion "to Jesus Christ and Him crucified" was the mark of his life. Hence his generous, tender love for all that the Eternal Word had deigned to think of—the birds, the breezes, the flowers, the sunsets, the dawns; above all, man, fallen and redeemed man, in all his misery, in all his opportunity, in all his splendid destiny, man in every rank and place, simply as man, but above all the miserable, the suffering, the poor. Everywhere he saw Jesus Christ and loved Him.

And what was the consequence? This. There have been great and serious Christians who have been so impressed with the awfulness of life—its miseries, its failures, its tragic situations—that, while they have been noble examples and bracing teachers, they have seemed to impress and warn, but give us no “comfort of the Gospel.” They are noble, they are helpful, they have their place. Such was Pascal, such (though scarcely Christian) has been poor Amiel. One thing they want utterly. There is one very necessary “fruit of the spirit”—needed, as I think, especially for us gloom-stricken, half-puritan Englishmen, needed especially in these times—which many great servants of God had not, which Francis had: the grace of brightness, the grace of joy. No man had passed through more terrible struggles of soul than he. No man had more utterly renounced all that human nature loves. No man had more than he to go on, all his life, with self-denial, disappointment, annoyance, trial, suffering to the end, yet no one heard a word of impatience from his lips, or a sound of anger on his tongue. With his life of fierce self-conquest and suffering he was, to all who came near him, a power of sunny sweetness, of bright and breezy delight, inspiring them to feel the exhilarating joy of being a Christian, the sweetness, the poetry, the comfort, the exaltation of trying truly to follow Jesus Christ.

Like all great saints Francis had keen intelligence, ready tact, large common sense. Lesser Christians, having “shortened thought,” and being unbalanced, often alas! “play the fool.” The saints never do. Their greatest gift, perhaps—certainly that of Francis—is common sense. Such a character, so exalted, so purified and effecting so mighty a work for his age, was sure to

leave behind him a tone and temper as an invaluable heritage. And so he did. This is what I venture to call "the Franciscan spirit."

It has been often said that many men are strong, but their very strength may lead them to be hard, and then unsympathetic ; that many men are sympathetic and tender, but then they are apt to verge upon weakness ; that many men are clear and decisive in their grip of truth, but their very decisiveness may lead them to be narrow, to close their eyes to the peculiar conditions and terrible contingencies which hover around mortal lives ; that others are broad and generous enough, but then they are misty and vague, they lose the sense of definite truth and are latitudinarian—which means helpless dreaming—not Catholic—which means exact but large.

From Francis there spread among his fellow men, and then among the men of his time, a spirit at once strong and tender—tender as a loving woman, strong as an indomitable force ; a spirit stern, exact, definite, playing no tricks with truth, nor emptying it of its meaning by vague generalisations ; and also broad and generous and loving, with large considerateness, and with tender affectionateness for all that was human, even though misguided and weak. A divine spirit ! A temper, making men feel the sweetness of Christianity and the beauty of the love of God, and hence making them hate iniquity as men hate darkness and death and her daughters, by feeling the sweetness of life, where the breezes are fresh, and the flowers are out, and the birds are singing in the breaking of the morning on the mountains when spring has come.

The Franciscan spirit did untold work for the saving of souls, for the advance of religion, for the progress of

civilisation, for the amelioration of the sad lot of sufferers in the society of the time.

If, as centuries rolled on, some Franciscans failed in their mission, and were unworthy of their calling—as all human institutions are doomed in time to some measure of failure—it was because they lost hold of the spirit of their founder, and where they have not failed, it is in proportion to the hold they have upon that spirit, so akin to “the mind of Christ.”

III

If the life of this saint be important for these and other reasons, an important question remains to be answered before one can study that life itself, viz., what are the sources of our knowledge ?

Fortunately for us, there are few saints so far removed from our own time as St. Francis, of whose lives and actions we possess such authentic details.

There are three principal sources of our knowledge as to St. Francis.

(1) There is first the life by Thomas of Celano, a brother of the Order, much esteemed for his saintliness. At Celano his festival is, I believe, still observed. At Tagliacozzo, where he died, his relics are still venerated, and the Franciscan Order treat him as one of the “Blessed.” He knew St. Francis intimately, and wrote his life, by order of Pope Gregory IX., a little more than a year after the saint’s death. This life was finished before the year 1230 A.D. It was called, on account of the Pope’s request for its composition, “The Legend of Gregory IX.”

Some years later, by request of the Provincials of the

the Order, Thomas wrote a fresh life. In it he relates more of the saint's youthful years, and then collects all the accounts of him which he had not gathered at the time of the composition of his earlier work. This went by the name of "The Second Life of St. Francis."

Of the first life an abridgment was made by John of Ceperano, who was not himself a member of the Order.* Also a translation into hexameter verse was made by, not improbably, a brother of the Order whose name is uncertain, but who has done his work well, and has shown great accuracy as to the dates connected with the saint's life.† These are the first sources of our knowledge.

(2) A new life was undertaken. This was done at the request of the General Chapter of Genoa in 1244. Three of the early companions of St. Francis, Rufinus, Angelo Tancredi, and Leo were appointed to do the work, and especially to supply the omissions as to St. Francis' early days found in Celano's life. This life, then, chiefly touches the early years; it includes anecdotes not noted before, and it is strict in its chronology. This was called the "Life by the Tres Socii," and is the second important source of our knowledge.‡

It was an epoch in the Franciscan Order, when St. Bonaventura was elected General in 1257. In 1260, at the request of the brethren, he undertook his life of the founder, which was meant to be, and for long held to be, the authoritative biography. He had himself known St. Francis intimately, and it was believed that it was by a miracle worked by St. Francis that he had been

* Parts are quoted in the *Acta Sanctorum*.

† Wadding believed that the author was an Englishman. There is some evidence, since forthcoming, that this is not so. The authorship is doubtful. Probably the work was done by one of the Order.

‡ This is to be found in the *Acta Sanctorum*.

saved from death at the age of four years. His life of St. Francis was published in 1263, and is known as "The New Legend." St. Bonaventura, in the first part, collects with care information unpublished before. This gives real value to this part of his work. In the second part he merely abridges and alters Thomas of Celano, and the earlier biographies. St. Bonaventura deliberately suppresses the facts as to the trouble St. Francis suffered from the more lax members of the brotherhood as to the practice of poverty. He probably felt it more prudent, as he was endeavouring himself, as General, to arrange and bring into harmony the two extreme parties, not to refer to the question in "the Life." This suppression, however desirable for edification at the moment, renders the second part of his work less valuable as history. This "New Legend" now became the accredited history of the life of the founder. This is our third source of knowledge.

The first life (*i.e.*, "The Legend of Gregory IX.") by Celano, is published by the Bollandists. In their magnificent work, the "Acta Sanctorum," they have collected all they could as to the life of this great saint as well as of others. They have also published the life by the "Tres Socii." "The Second Life," by Celano, they did not publish, owing to a mistaken notion apparently, that it was a mere supplement. This, however, has been published by Rinaldi. The Bollandists have also published extracts from the abridgment of John of Ceperano. Thus we possess all the "Ancient Legend," *i.e.*, the early and most authentic lives. Further, they have published the life by St. Bonaventura, which is also in the folio edition of that saint's works. We are, therefore, in possession of all the early lives of the saint, written by his contemporaries. The Commentary also,

(by Fr. Constant Suysken) in the "Acta Sanctorum," is most valuable. It is not, of course, possible for all from lack of time or from circumstances to read these lives in their original form. As we have such valuable sources of information, however, it is possible to have the saint before us very much as he appeared to those who knew him best.

It is worth while, also, to be acquainted with the history of the earliest of these lives. We have seen that St. Bonaventura, from prudence in the then state of things, passed over in silence certain difficulties caused by the more lax members of the brotherhood, during the life of the founder. It was thought by others in authority that what St. Bonaventura had deemed it prudent to suppress, ought to be altogether dropped out of sight. Accordingly the Chapter General assembled in Paris in 1266, ordered that "The Ancient Legend" should no longer be read, and should, to the utmost of the power of all the brotherhood, be destroyed. Fortunately this law was in some cases disobeyed. "The Ancient Legend" was—notwithstanding the order—actually read in the Convent of Avignon. Gérard de Oddo, elected General in 1329, is said to have even ordered it to be read, and in this way it was preserved. For hundreds of years however, St. Bonaventura's "Life" (*i.e.*, "The New Legend") held the field. It was not until the eighteenth century that the Bollandists discovered Thomas of Celano's "Life," in the Cistercian abbey of Longpont, and that of "the Tres Socii," in a Franciscan convent at Louvain; and it was not until the beginning of the nineteenth century that Fr. Rinaldi, a Franciscan, published "The Second Life" of Celano, from a manuscript he had discovered, together with a fresh

edition of "The First Life," from a manuscript which he considered superior to that of Longpont.

IV

It is not necessary perhaps to enumerate the various works, ancient or modern, which, on the subject before us, were all built upon these foundations. For a very long time, short subsequent lives of the saint were necessarily drawn from St. Bonaventura, with occasional references to such scraps of "The Ancient Legend" as one way or another had been preserved. It is well, however, to remember how there has always been a continuous stream of writers of more or less value on the subject, for this shows us how deeply the life and character of St. Francis had sunk into the heart of Europe.

Towards the end of the fourteenth century Bartholomew of Pisa wrote what he called "The Book of Conformities," a devout work intended to show the likeness of Francis' life and deeds to those of our Blessed Lord. Early in the sixteenth century a chronicle of the Order was written by one Mariano of Florence, a Franciscan brother, and another about the middle of that century by one Mark of Lisbon. In the seventeenth century an Irish brother, Luke Wadding, wrote his great work, "The Annals of the Minorites," which is of real value, although it suffers from his ignorance of some of the earlier documents. Then came works, in more modern times, by Italians and Frenchmen of note, which all show extended knowledge and more real criticism, thanks to the appearance of the true sources, referred to already, by the care of the Bollandists and of Rinaldi.

In our own times one may remember Mrs. Oliphant's "Life of St. Francis," and a fine essay in Sir James Stephen's "Essays in Ecclesiastical Biography." The former is as good as can be when written by one with very insufficient imaginative sympathy either with the times or the man, and not in any way professing to have mastered the real history of either ; the latter, while it shows what one is sure to find in the writer, a power of narrative and real historical instinct, is greatly spoilt by insufficient knowledge of the original sources, as well as by a foolish Protestant temper and prejudice, which, like all narrowing influences, invariably closes the eyes to much truth. The Life by Chavin de Malan is good, but spoilt by its unceasing tone of panegyric. The Abbé Le Monnier has written a Life quite to be relied upon, but distressing from its bad style and its fulsome Roman tone. Sabatier has dealt with the subject in his scholar-like manner, and supplemented his conclusions by an important article in the *Revue Chrétienne*, and there are many others.

V

We may be very sure then that we do not lose our time in dwelling upon the life of this truly great man.

It has been noted by a thoughtful and learned teacher* that we may well dwell upon the mysterious and providential manner in which some of the greatest works of human genius have only just escaped non-existence, and have been brought to their birth and also preserved for after generations. But for apparently accidental circumstances we should never have had the "Divina Commedia"

* Dean Church, *Essay on Dante*.

of Dante. In the same way, but for a somewhat unlikely event, we should never have known the true life of St. Francis. The Franciscan brotherhood at Avignon, contrary to probability, preserved and read "The Ancient Legend." A Franciscan brother of Hungarian extraction, Fabian by name, made a copy of much that he heard, and adding to these the little-known narratives, he left behind him an, at any rate, approximately accurate reproduction of "The Ancient Legend." Thus, and after a lapse of several centuries, the world came into possession of the true life of the founder of the Order of Minorites.

Besides this, we cannot fail to dwell—when we look on this life in a devotional temper—on the way in which God ordered the work of his great servant for the advancement of all that is of most value to humanity. We have learnt to feel, as men more and more have felt in our days, that there are two important orders of God's working for his creatures here—civilisation and religion. They have been sometimes opposed. They ought to be at one. They have interlaced, and then again parted the one from the other. Both are great and valuable as coming from God, but not indeed of equal value. In the term civilisation we include all that goes to fit man for his place here and now, this side the grave. It has been slow in its development, and often with serious checks and hindrances. Still more and more, especially in the West, there have been discoveries and efforts and achievements, there have been vast advances in historical studies, in literary production, in the development of language and the extension of thought, in mechanical contrivance, in scientific investigation — all which have gone to render life here in this world less difficult and more useful in every way. It is a strange and striking thing,

how evidently society is God's appointment, and civilisation one of His blessed and fruitful orders of gifts to men, and yet it concerns this world, which, for each of us so soon, for all before so very long, is to pass away. It has struck all men how opposed to the spirit of the New Testament civilisation appears in many particulars. In many particulars it is opposed, but it is still meant to be, and it is—not, indeed, in the dark stains upon it from man's sins—a work and gift of God. New sins have, indeed, emerged from it, but also fresh virtues, and there is no denying that there has been a "progressive refinement of our human nature." As the ages have advanced—allowing for all the many evils—new characteristic gifts and powers have come out. New possessions in the memories, ways, thoughts, teachings of great men, in fresh and helpful feelings, sentiments, modes of action have been given to us—treasures gained for mankind and never lost. And yet higher and more glorious is religion. For at the best, our life here is a short and trying business, and we are meant for the inconceivable glories of immortality. The things of time are not to be despised. They are to be used, not abused. They are meant to

"try us and turn us forth
Sufficiently impressed."

to serve as subject matter of our responsibility, to form us, and to show of what metal we are made, and what, in ourselves, we are.

Now one of the matters of keenest interest in St. Francis is the way in which his work was a wonderful step in God's providential order for fashioning and forwarding the civilisation of the West; and this, too, by his peculiar treatment of the things of time, and his

direct devotion to religion. Every one, I repeat, is startled by the chasm that seems to yawn between the plain teachings of Christ and modern society and the modern Church. All sorts of solutions have been suggested in view of this problem. And nothing, as we know, is cheaper than "modern Christianity"—i.e., "civilised heathenism"—and the easy assertion that the history of the Church is the history of a base betrayal. Well, one advantage in the study of the life of our saint is that it, perhaps, throws some welcome light upon the subject. These points are to be observed :

(1) Our Lord taught of "the narrow way ;" the "few being saved ;" the "kingdom not of this world ;" that "the world" would "hate" His children ; that those who are reviled are the blessed ; how the rich are hardly to be saved ; how men were to give up, forsake, "hate" their nearest ties ; how they were to "sell all they had ;" how, when smitten, they were to "turn the other cheek ;" how they were to find blessing in "giving rather than in receiving ;" how they were not to "lay up treasures upon earth ;" how they were not to "take thought for the morrow ;" how, if men were to be His disciples, they were to give up all, even "their own lives also."

(2) Our Lord acted what He taught. It has been truly said that "His words were only generalisations of what He did." It was not merely that He suffered, but that the regular course of His life was "enduring hardness and privation and pain, and was at constant war with society."

(3) His immediate followers learned the lesson so well that with them it was the same. We have only to read the records of apostolic lives, or listen to apostolic words, to be sure it was so.

(4) Now out of all this, which seems at entire variance with it, comes modern society. The ordinary ways, motives, business of life, the things without which life cannot go on in the society we know—law, commerce, art, war, social amusements, our forms of education, at first sight seem entirely opposed to all this, out of which, in fact, they have come.

(5) What have Christians to say to this? They have to say certain things which they hope and believe account for it all, without special pleading and without evasion. In the first place they say that at the first Christianity was meant to take up a strong and uncompromising position, in order to break up a society which had corrupted itself to the core, and to remake it and give it a fresh start. At first it had to be literally at war with society. Again, in its full sense, this can have been meant only for the beginning of things; only for the time of a fierce and necessary revolution. The reason is that God is the author of society, as well as of religion. We are bound by religion itself to believe that the facts and tendencies of the world in which we live, are modes of God's revelation of His will, and indications of His purposes. The regulated arrangements of life now must be as they are, if men are to behave to one another as religion requires them to do. If so they are God's appointment; if so the necessity of things shows that He meant, after the first upheaving, that a wider and deeper interpretation should be put upon our Lord's trenchant words, that the Church was to leaven and absorb society at last, and bless it, and restrain it, and sanctify it, and charm it into some measure of goodness, and diminish the evil in it, and take the sting out of its dangerous tendencies, and while continuing to be at war with the sin in it, was in the long

run to be no longer at war with society itself. God wills, the Christian believes, to teach us indeed that life is short, and this world is in many ways "vanity of vanities," but also to insist that men have a work, a calling, a career in it, which—if they attend to religion—they must fulfil, and which is part of God's calling for them now. The Church, they believe, had evidently at first to fight and smash society so as to reform and remake it; it had, therefore, at first to submit to restraints and limitations, which, in the long run, guided—as was promised—by the Spirit of God, it was intended to pass. It had at first to give up many things which afterwards it was to use as means and opportunities of serving God.

(6) What then is the reason of such words as those of Christ? The answer is (1), as I have said, society had to be broken and reformed, but (2) they were necessary, seeing that the object was to impress upon mankind the transitoriness of life, the certainty of immortality, the greatness and awfulness of the future. It has been nobly said, that to do this there must have been a sacrifice of immense self-surrender; just as a soldier, or a great patriot makes a sacrifice in great and critical moments. In fact the first thing to remember is that these solemn words of Christ "did mean something more for those days than they do for ours."*

(7) But there is more. We still hold a religion the centre of which is the cross and resurrection of our God, made man. The severe words of the New Testament are only faint reverberations of the awful mystery of the crucifixion of the Son of God. In our ears, whatever be the claims of society, and whatever our very real duties

* Dean Church, *The Gifts of Civilisation*. See his profound teaching there on the whole subject.

towards it, the imperious claim of Christianity for self-denial and unworldliness of spirit do not mean nothing. Of course not, for a God, crucified in love for us, is ours as much as the possession of the first age. We can never fail to have our thoughts and ways restrained and toned and guided, no matter how society advances and changes, by the thought of all the view of things involved in the Cross. "Stat crux dum volvitur orbis." And Christ's teachings for us, as well as for the first age, keep before us, and urge us—in all our right efforts for temporal progress—never to forget the true proportion between the things of time and those of eternity. The New Testament, requiring us to do our duty now, is still to us the ever speaking witness of our greatness and our destiny, and of the awful seriousness and certainty of the life beyond the grave.

Besides, God's tenderness and considerateness are marvellous. "He knoweth whereof we are made. He remembereth that we are but dust;" but, however, He helps and considers His children; He has given us a standard whereby to measure all things. "As long as Christianity lasts, the heroic ideal must be the standard of all human life." In fact now, as well as in the first age, the Christian has to be ready, if needed, to deny himself, to leave all things for Christ, to suffer pain, privation, misunderstanding, what the world calls failure, if called upon to do it, for duty, for Christ. The Christian still learns that though there is variety in the application of Christ's maxims, and a wide interpretation allowed, so as to apply them to that society of which God is Himself the author, yet in all times, and under all circumstances, the spirit of Christ is to be learnt and practised, and selfishness to be looked upon as "the accursed thing."

VI

Well, when such considerations are clear before our minds, we are more likely to enter into the greatness, the unique beauty of the life and character of St. Francis. "Mirabilis Deus in sanctis suis ; Deus Israel ipse dabit virtutem et fortitudinem plebi suæ ; benedictus Deus." "God is wonderful in His saints ; it is the God of Israel who Himself will give strength and power unto His people, blessed be God."

"Strength and power" were indeed given in this case ; in this saint indeed God was wonderful. He has been spoken of* as a "passionate soul of quick sensibility," into whom naturally, the several sayings of the New Testament would sink deep. That, doubtless, is true, but there is more in it than that. The whole movement initiated by St. Francis had a striking resemblance in many points to the first age of the Church. There was much cruelty and oppression ; the poor were in almost hopeless misery ; the rich wrapped in worldliness, selfishness, and luxury. Religion had become to a great extent merely nominal. The Church was failing in her mission, deeply corrupt, and terribly inefficient ; words had taken the place of things. Shibboleths served instead of vital doctrines. Nothing could save such a society but a complete break up of men's ideas. Francis effected that, and he effected it by the closest following in the path of his Master that this world has probably ever seen. Like Christ he "came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil." He knew and accepted the divine mission and authority of the Church,

* By M. Renan.

but he threw life and reality into what were fast becoming empty forms. Like his Master he entered into closest sympathy with the poor, the miserable, the lost. He brought fresh hope into lives which were sinking into despair, and brought the sunlight of eternity into one of the darkest and most stormy days of time.

And what was his method ? It was precisely the method of Christ. It is all very well, with our colder hearts and imagined wisdom to talk of him as being "eccentric" or "grotesque." If his ways were so, so were the ways of Christ Himself. It is not to be wondered at if shallow or worldly minds make light of his actions. Men once called his great Master "mad," and called Him "gluttonous," "wine-bibber," "friend of publicans and sinners." A corrupt society does not easily forgive an attack upon its corruptions. Evil livers do not easily forgive an example which puts them to shame. As the Master, so the servant. To save society Francis came into direct collision with society, as his Master had done before. It was a fresh beginning, a reproduction on a small scale of the first age. And this, Francis achieved as no man before or since has achieved, by the closest possible following of Christ. There have been other great reformers, but they failed in following Christ's method, and so, if they have done some good, they have done much harm ; if they have attacked some evils, they have not built up—they have pulled down and left behind them ruins. Francis took Christ literally at His word. The Sermon on the Mount was to him and to his immediate friends, the most literal of directions. That its spirit might revive in society, which could not of necessity take its teaching "au pied de la lettre," Francis himself and those with him, in their own persons, did take that teaching so.

Christ had done so, and thus had reconstituted society and saved the world. Francis felt that society needed arousing, indeed reforming, and that if this was to be done, and if the world of his day was to be saved, he must in his small work follow closely his Master's lead, in His mighty work of saving men. This is the glory of this great reformer. He, more than any religious reformer since apostolic days, not only had the genius to see, but the strength and love to act out, that which was most needed for the great end before him. He, more than any other, followed exactly, literally, unflinchingly in the steps of Christ. I cannot illustrate and enforce this better than by quoting the words of Leo XIII. in his encyclical letter, on the occasion of the centenary of St. Francis.

“The Liberator of the human race, Jesus Christ,” so writes the present Pope, “is the inexhaustible and eternal source of all the blessings which come to us from the goodness of God, and He who once and at first saved the world, is the same who must save it in all succeeding centuries: ‘For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.’* If, then, humanity is falling into a state of degeneracy through the passions or crimes of men, to such a degree that special help seems needed to raise it up, it is absolutely necessary that recourse should be had to Jesus Christ, and that He should be recognised as the most powerful and most certain means of safety. So great and so efficacious is His divine strength, that it is at once the refuge against all perils and the remedy for all evils. And the cure is certain if humanity is brought to accept the wise teachings of Christianity, and to conform itself to the rules of life traced out by the Gospel. At any time when such evils spring up, the hour also has come by providential arrange-

* *Acts. iv. 12.*

ment for the necessary help ; it is then that God raises up some man, not taken at random from the crowd, but some man of eminence and might, and to him He intrusts the mission of obtaining the salvation of all. It is this that happened at the close of the twelfth century, and the following years ; and St. Francis was the workman employed on this great work.

"This epoch of history, with its mixture of virtues and vices is well known. The Catholic Faith had at that time struck its roots deeper in souls than now, and it was a striking sight to see multitudes inflamed with piety going into Palestine, resolved to conquer or to die ; but on the other hand, licence had deeply injured morality and there was nothing more necessary for men than a return to the true spirit of Christianity. Now the perfection of Christian virtue is a generous disposition of soul to meet difficult and arduous things. This disposition is symbolised in that cross which any one who wishes to follow Jesus Christ must bear upon his shoulders. Its result is detachment of heart from perishable things, the rendering of a man entirely master of himself, and the enabling him to accept adversity with calmness and resignation. In fact that charity which embraces God and one's neighbour is the chief and queen of all others. Such is its power that before it all those difficulties which are inseparable from the fulfilment of duty disappear, and that the most severe toils are rendered not only bearable but even pleasant. These virtues were rare in the twelfth century at a time when too many, totally enslaved by things temporal, either were madly covetous of honour and wealth, or were spending their lives in luxury and pleasure. Power was in the hands of a few who used it for little else than to oppress the people who were miserable and despised. The infection of the common vices had even spread to those who, by their calling, ought to have been models of all. The chilled condition of charity brought daily fresh scourges with it : envy, jealousy, hatred. Men's minds

were so excited and divided that for the most paltry reasons neighbouring cities made war upon one another. Private persons, even, frequently flew to arms one against the other.

“Such was the age in which Francis appeared. With a simplicity not less admirable than his constancy, he undertook to present, by his words and by his acts, to a society fast going to dissolution, the finished ideal of Christian perfection. . . . He received the commission to lead the faithful to virtue, and to lead men, who had greatly and for long gone astray, to the imitation of Jesus Christ. It was certainly not by mere chance that in the ears of this young man were heard the evangelical counsels, ‘Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves ;’* and again, ‘If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven ; and come and follow me.’† Applying these words to himself as if they had been said expressly for him, Francis despoiled himself immediately of everything, gave up the ordinary clothing of his social condition, and took poverty as the inseparable companion of his life, and desired that these great maxims of virtue which he had embraced with such nobility and generosity should be the fundamental rule of his Order. Henceforth he was to be seen moving about in the midst of an age ruined by softness and delicacy, with an external appearance neglected and almost repulsive, begging for his food from door to door, and, what was much more painful, not only putting up with the jeers of an angry populace with resignation, but even seeming to relish them with an incredible avidity. The fact was he had embraced ‘the folly of the Cross’ of Jesus Christ, and looked upon it as the absolute wisdom. After he had sounded the depth and understood the meaning of its august mysteries,

* Matt. x. 9, 10.

† Matt. xix. 21.

he saw and declared that in nothing else could be glory.

“Along with the love of the Cross a vehement charity took possession of the heart of Francis, and bore him on with vigour to extend the conquests of the Gospel, even though in such an enterprise he was sure to expose his life to certain dangers. This charity embraced all men. Those whom he loved, however, by preference, were the poorest and the most ruined ; and he seemed to have special pleasure in those whom the world avoids, or from whom it turns away with disgust. Thus has he deserved well of that brotherhood by means of which our Lord Jesus Christ—restoring it and making it perfect—has formed of the whole human race a single family, under the rule of one God—the common Father of all.

“By so many virtues, above all by the austerity of his life, this irreproachable man applied himself to the reproduction, as far as he could, of the image of Jesus Christ. . . . Thus Francis was to become, in those troublous times, the firm support and pillar of Christianity. And then Francis did not hesitate for a moment to set to work. Those twelve companions who first of all placed themselves under his guidance, were, so to speak, a small seed which was sown by the grace of God, and under the auspices of the Sovereign Pontiff evidently transformed into an abundant harvest. When they had learnt in holiness to follow the example of Christ, Francis divided amongst them the different countries of Italy and of Europe for the preaching of the Gospel. To some he even gave a mission to penetrate into Africa. There was no delay, no hesitation. Poor as they were, without great learning, full of simplicity, they mingled amongst the people. In the cross streets and public squares of the towns, without the customary dress of the various places, without pomp of language, they exhorted their hearers to contempt of the things of this world and thought of the world to come. It is marvellous to think of the fruits

which came from the efforts of these workers, apparently so insufficient for such work. Hungering for their teaching, the multitudes pressed around them. People wept bitterly for their sins, forgot their quarrels, and as discord was appeased, they came to thoughts and feelings of peace. It is impossible to convey an accurate idea of the wonderful attraction and fascination with which the masses were drawn to Francis. Great multitudes of people crowded together wherever he came. Often too, in small places as well as in populous cities, men of every condition implored him to enrol them under his rule."*

Such is the eloquent and vivid statement of Leo XIII. on the general effect of Francis' mission ; such the wise and penetrating view of the real root of its marvellous success. Times were troubled. Religion had flagged. Cruelty and selfishness were abroad. Souls deep down are ever hungering for goodness, for truth. "O anima naturaliter Christiana !" God raised up this wonderful man at the needed moment. Francis felt, under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, that men needed a fresh start ; he saw and felt also, that as in the first age, so in the opening of the thirteenth century, nothing could give that fresh start but a real reproduction and presentation before their eyes of the life of Jesus Christ. It is this which makes him, after St. Paul, probably the most remarkable missionary and apostle that the world has ever seen.

Such are the more general thoughts on this interesting subject upon which the student of such a remarkable life may wisely dwell. It has been the habit of some modern writers,

* *Lettres Encycliques du Pape Léon XIII. à l'occasion du centenaire de Saint François d'Assise.* Quoted in the *Vie de Saint François*, par le R. R. Leopold de Chévancé, des Frères Mineurs Capucins. Paris : Librairie Plon. 1883.

wanting in a devout spirit, or, indeed, devoid of historical imagination and instinct, to speak of this great apostle and reformer in a tone of condescending compassion, as of one well-meaning, indeed, but childish and grotesque. Such persons we can put aside with a smile of kindly pity, which is their due. St. Francis was one of the greatest, noblest, and holiest of men ever raised up by God for a splendid work for His glory. In an age of pygmies, in an age of middlingness like our own, we do well with awe and humility to contemplate so great an example of the power and love of God. His exact methods were not, indeed, the methods which would be most effective or are the most needed now ; but we are unreal and unwise if on this account we quarrel with them or put them aside and so miss their meaning, unless, indeed, we are willing to put aside and quarrel with the methods of Jesus Christ Himself. The narrow, the prejudiced men of "shortened thought," smile contemptuously at the work of Francis, just as the unbelieving and blinded mind scorns the life and work of our divine Master. The methods employed by the Master, and those followed out by His great servant, are not, indeed, the same as those which God, on the whole, teaches His Church to make use of now ; still, unless we are prepared to say that the Gospel history has no teaching for us because our civilisation is different from the manner of Palestine in the time of Christ, and because we know much through the loving teaching of Christ in His Church which could only then be known and brought home by the startling sayings and startling life of our Master—unless we are prepared to say this, we shall not dare to say that we have no need of the teaching of His close follower and devoted disciple, even though England is not Umbria, nor the nineteenth century the

same as the thirteenth century, nor the methods of the Church in our time precisely the methods of Francis in the past.

No ; surely if we have intelligent minds and open hearts, and if we treat the subject with due devotion, there are abundant lessons for us all to learn from the contemplation of the life of this great servant of God.

Every earnest mind, at any rate, may find lessons in the life of so great a saint and hero which God may give all grace to learn.

(1) We see here the wonderful providence of God. We are inclined to despair when we see worldliness, fanaticism, heresy, uncharity, injuring and hindering the Church ; when we see those without assaulting her, and those within faint-hearted or treacherous. Let us take courage : "Man's necessity is God's opportunity." When the man is needed God raises him up. God has never forsaken his Church, and He never will. "Deus mirabilis in sanctis." "O God, wonderful art Thou in Thy saints ; even the God of Israel : He will give strength and power unto His people : blessed be God."

(2) Again, may we not learn the marvellous power of fearlessness, constancy, and decision of character, when filled with the grace of God ? With these, guided by meekness, Francis saved the Christian religion in his time. "The meek shall inherit the earth." "Them that are meek shall He guide in judgment, and such as are gentle, them shall He learn His way."

(3) And, lastly, we may well remember with shame and repentance our vehement, angry, partisan ways of defending God's cause when we think of the sweetness, tenderness, and strength of the Franciscan spirit, which was, indeed, the spirit of Jesus Christ. "The wrath of

man worketh not the righteousness of God ; " no, but strength and love which God gives to those who seek Him can work that righteousness to everlasting life.

" Hold to the truth, be calm and fear no failing,
Be faithful, though the best beloved betray,
Fret not, no strength in that;
Weep not, no time for wailing;
Be strong, work on, beyond these clouds
Is brighter day."

CHAPTER II

EXTERNAL HISTORY OF THE TIMES OF ST. FRANCIS

IT is never possible to gauge in any just manner the life and work of any really great man, unless we realise as fully, as may be, the circumstances of his time. Further, it is important to remember that there is what may be called the external as well as the internal history of any period, and especially of any period in the life of the Church. A great many of the writers of the life of St. Francis have dealt with him either as a marvellous phenomenon of emotional enthusiasm producing for the moment a startling effect, and then disappearing without fruitful and permanent results, or as so great a saint that his work could not be measured by ordinary rules, and that in dealing with it one ought only to permit oneself the language of panegyric ; or as a beautiful and tender character, useful for purposes of art and poetry, but for little else. These views have in them, each of them, certainly an element of truth ; but they are altogether insufficient to explain the phenomena before us, and it is for this reason that the modern lives of St. Francis seem in many respects unsatisfactory. I am not so foolish as to imagine that the present writer can fill the void, but at any rate an honest contribution to a subject which one has made a point of special study is, one may hope, not

altogether useless, and I shall try to indicate what that life really means, and wherein we may more fully grasp the meaning of it, by carefully examining the facts at our disposal. I have already pointed out that we have very considerable material which can be relied upon for grasping the facts and conditions of the saint's life, and it only requires patience and thoughtfulness and study to make those materials say what they mean.

It has been said of a late very eminent French ecclesiastic,* "La charité fut le mobile unique auquel il obéit." The same may of course be said with truth, with absolute truth, with confidence in the completeness of the truth, of St. Francis; but then the form taken by that love of God and love of man which is comprehended in "la charité"—that is the interest of so great a life, and that depends upon a number of conditions which we ought thoughtfully to examine. I shall venture, therefore, to speak in this chapter of what I call the *external* history of the times in which St. Francis lived, because it is only by bringing that history vividly before the imagination that one can hope in any measure to understand the peculiarity and greatness of his work.

The life and work of St. Francis covers, broadly speaking, the latter part of the twelfth and earlier part of the thirteenth century. He was born in 1181; he died in 1226. He died, therefore, comparatively young. There is another great man whose life and work almost covered the same time as that of St. Francis, and who, in one sense, had an influence upon that life and work, while, in another sense, that life and work greatly influenced his. Innocent III. was born in 1161, and died

* Monseigneur D'Hulst, in a sympathetic paper on his life and work, in the *Revue du Clergé françois*.

in 1216, so that, although the life of St. Francis extended for some years into the pontificate of Honorius III., it was chiefly that of Innocent which had to do with the work of the great saint.

During his lifetime, Innocent III. is by far the greatest figure in European history. He stands a head and shoulders, so to speak, above the men of his age; and many of them were not inconsiderable persons. In some respects at least, he was the greatest of the Popes. There are stains upon his character, as I shall have occasion to point out, but they are not so deep or dark as has been represented by prejudice and passion. His weaknesses and mistakes were to a great extent those of his age, and his achievements were all his own; he seems to have had the strength of Hildebrand with a more equitable judgment, and the fire of Boniface VIII. with much more piety and with a freedom from his untempered violence. No one can deny who knows the history of the time, that Innocent III. was a great, and in spite of his faults, a good man. That he was a great statesman, that he moulded his age and left his mark behind him, it would be foolish to question. He certainly raised the Papedom to its highest point of eminence and it is owing to him that the thirteenth century, with all its weakness and with all its greatness—sometimes scarcely realised—is marked, above all, by the triumphant supremacy of the papal see over the most civilised part of mankind. We do well to remember—because later circumstances and prejudices and facts bribe us to forget—that in the providence of God, that supremacy was of the highest advantage to the development of European civilisation and the cause of religion. There were certain very great ideas represented by the Papacy which were, in the

Middle Ages, of the greatest importance to the world and especially of the greatest importance to the poor. The mass of mankind at the time were down-trodden by the feudal system ; sovereigns and the great nobles exercised most cruel autocracy ; there were constant wars, there were severe exactions and taxations. To no one in authority did the mass of the people seem of the slightest account ; that ridiculous arrogance which is natural to human nature at all times and which leads people in the modern, as well as in the old world, to imagine that those of less wealth, less education, and in what is called a "lower class" than themselves, are not of the same flesh and blood nor of the same value in the eyes of God, reached its height in the autocratic behaviour of sovereigns and nobles in the Middle Ages. It is bad enough now and in all times—for man is a fallen being, and as a fallen being he has innate in him an arrogant vulgarity—but in modern times it can only show itself in detail and upon occasion ; it is held in check by public opinion ; it is held in check by the steady advance of Christian ideas with which it is in direct opposition. It was not so in the thirteenth century ; no one fought it and conquered it more effectively in the spiritual and interior working of the Church than St. Francis, but the one great power which, speaking broadly, held it down and kept it in restraint was the Papedom. Whatever arrogance or cruelty or violence may be charged, and justly charged on individual Popes, the Papedom itself was a democratic sovereignty ; it was a final court of appeal against the insolence and injustice of autocratic rulers ; it represented in the minds of men the power of righteousness and truth as against passion and self-will ; it declared—and men held to it because it declared—that spiritual ideas are greater

than thoughts of the present ; that righteousness and obedience to God's law are far above the self-willed ordinances of man ; that the things of time are less than the things of eternity.

These were the great ideas which gave real force to the Papacy in the Middle Ages and these ideas were of enormous value at the time. It was a great thing that insolent tyrants and abusers of mankind—men like John of England, men like Joannitius of Bulgaria—should have before their eyes the vision of a supreme power, to whom their oppressed subjects might make their appeal, and one that was possessed of forces which they dare not assail and which would bring them to their bearings. If we lived in an ideal world, and if there could be any security that Popes should always be saints and always gifted with superhuman wisdom, statesmanship, and self-denial, nothing could be more valuable to mankind than the Papedom. Unfortunately we do not live in such a world and many Popes have been worldly, intriguing, and even bad, but that does not hinder us—if we have any respect for truth—from being grateful for the valuable part played by the Papacy in the development of European civilisation and higher ideas. No one, probably, who ever occupied the papal throne, grasped more strongly or carried out more effectively these higher ideas than Innocent III.

Although the ideas in themselves are good and true, we see as we read history that they became exaggerated and out of proportion as time went on. The occupant of the papal throne was also a temporal sovereign and he was tempted to ascribe acts and efforts, which were often made from personal ambition, to a zeal for the cause of God. Even Innocent himself was not free from this danger, and

the variations in his policy, as we shall see as we go on, cannot but be attributed to this tendency ; it is certainly true that spiritual power is of a rank vastly more exalted in the hierarchy of things than temporal power ; it is also true that temporal power has a tendency towards insolent aggressiveness, as we have seen even in our own times, but it does not follow that spiritual power is therefore to use the weapons of the world, instead of using the weapons of the kingdom of God ; and in the unhappy pretences of the necessary right of temporal power still kept up by the adherents of the Papacy, we see the miserable consequences of noble ideas and high principles wrongly applied. But again we should remember, that even if those ideas and principles have been wrongly applied, they are in themselves noble and useful to mankind, and better in themselves and sometimes in their application, however faulty, than the utilitarian worldliness which more and more finds favour now ; than the cringing of the Church, alas ! too often, to the powers of the world.

Again, there were some deplorable mistakes made in that century for which, indeed, the Papacy alone is not responsible ; there was the terrible mistake of supposing that truth could be defended by intolerant cruelty. It is not for us, who have scarcely yet outlived the age of bigoted intolerance, to find fault with the great men of the thirteenth century, if they scarcely dreamt of the possibility of toleration at all. We may, indeed, safely say that the vast mistakes made by even some of the greatest of the Popes in fundamental questions of morals, such as those involved in matters of toleration and cruelty, prove beyond question that the assertion of the infallibility of the Roman see "per se et non a consensu ecclesiae," is evidently false. A power

divinely guided and infallible in moral questions could not possibly have permitted many of the dark deeds in Europe and Asia, done in even so great a reign as that of Innocent III. In a word, the pretensions of the Papacy have been unhappily exaggerated, and consequently the Papacy itself has been answerable for many of the troubles of mankind, and to a great extent for the present disunion of Christendom, but that ought not to prevent us, I repeat, from recognising its greatness and the immense debt that we owe to the occupants of the see of St. Peter in the Middle Ages for their assertion of great principles, for their protection of the weak against the strong, for their insistence in the midst of worldly ambitions that there is no kingdom so great as the kingdom of God. Looking dispassionately at the whole question, probably to no pontiff is so great a debt of gratitude due as to him who influenced the external history of Christendom in this century, as much as St. Francis influenced its internal history, *viz.*, Innocent III.

There were many things in the history of Europe at that time which gave Innocent a great opportunity. In saying this, we must not be supposed to mean that he was an intriguer or diplomat, seizing an opportunity to advance his own interests ; very far from it. The fact is, that the circumstances of Europe then required the intervention of a supreme power, and the grasp of a strong hand ; men's minds had been habituated more and more since the days of Gregory VII. to expect such intervention and to require such grasp ; and Innocent III. was not unequal to the occasion. He belonged to a noble family—the family of the Conti. That family had not been so mixed up in the petty wars of the princes of the Romagna as to make him—as so many Popes were

made by their family connections—a mere partisan. His father was the Count of Trasimondo of Segna, and his mother belonged to a distinguished Roman family. He was the youngest of four brothers, and was born at Anagni, afterwards so celebrated in connection with the sorrows of the great Pope Boniface VIII. He was connected with many important ecclesiastics, and was the nephew, probably on the side of his mother, of Pope Clement III. He was educated in his early days in Rome; he then studied theology in Paris—then at the height of its glory in such things—and studied law in Bologna. He is said to have made a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas of Canterbury, and when he returned to Rome, he was looked upon as a man of great learning and unstained character. He made rapid advances in positions of ecclesiastical dignity, due in part of course to the high place held by his uncle, first as cardinal and then as Pope; he was raised to a canonry at St. Peter's, and before he was quite twenty-nine, became a cardinal.

On the death of Clement III., Celestine III. succeeded; he was of the family of the Orsini, and that family had been in some measure opposed to the family of the late Pope; his accession to the papal throne checked the advance of the young cardinal, but Celestine III. was an old man, and his pontificate lasted only about seven years. Those seven years Innocent passed for the most part in retirement and it was during this retirement that he wrote his work, "De contemptu mundi." In tone it is severely ascetic, and approaches the exaggerations of Calvin in its view of the natural corruption of human nature; in style, it is clear and strong; it shows a temper of mind capable of grasping the greatness of unseen things, and doing justice to a lofty

enthusiasm like that of St. Francis. On the death of Celestine III. he was elected to the Papedom, although the youngest in the College of Cardinals, with entire unanimity. He was horrified at his sudden elevation and besought with tears that he might not be forced to so great a responsibility ; he was one of those single-minded men in whom the “*Nolo episcopari*”—though the world finds it hard to believe it—seems to have been entirely sincere. He was only thirty-seven at the time, he was only in deacon’s orders, and was obliged to be ordained priest and bishop in order to become Pope ; he shrank indeed from so great a responsibility, but once it became inevitable, he faced it, and acted upon it in a manner quite consistent with all that we know of him. The impression made by his own words, as well as the impression he made upon his contemporaries, shows him to have been a man of very deep religious seriousness and immense strength of character. It is a fact worthy of note that the name of “Innocent” was not so much assumed by him, as thrust upon him by those who elected him to the papal chair.

There may have been, and doubtless was, in the pontificate of Innocent much that led to the aggrandisement of the Papacy at the moment, and yet prepared afterwards for its fall ; still there can be no doubt that at the moment Christendom needed a strong hand, and that, in the providence of God, that strong hand was given in Innocent. One of the greatest masters of history of our time, has reminded us that whilst many of the pretensions of the Papacy have been founded upon mere theory, assumption, or even forgery, yet that there was an element of truth and a sense of need, which gave those pretensions substantive power. Then he goes on : “The spiritual

claims of the Papacy, however unjustifiable in their early history, were to a large extent justified by the beneficial use to which they were put by the better pontiffs. The court of Rome was a tribunal for international arbitrament, the efficiency of which was one great proof of the law-abiding character of the ages which it influenced. I do not forget the wars of the mediæval Papacy—wars, some of them, which were encouraged and even prompted by those who were, *ex officio*, the peace-makers of the world—but when we consider how, with all those exceptions, the influence of the Church during these ages, worked from the Roman centre, was, as a rule, employed for the prevention of war, for the shortening of inevitable struggles, and for the healing of wounds that could not otherwise have been healed, we cannot deny to it such justification as belongs to men who believe themselves to be the ministers of a higher than human righteousness."* I quote these words of a great master of history to illustrate and enforce what I have already said, and there seems to me to have been in the history of the Papacy no more distinguished illustration of their truth than the Pope of whom I am speaking. Fearful of taking the great responsibility upon him, humble, with a humility which made him feel his unworthiness for so high a place, he was yet so strong and determined when once that place was taken, that he swept all before him and gained the assent, and even in the main, the respect of Christendom. And let it be remembered distinctly that he had to wield the power, then so enormously important, at the early age of thirty-nine.

The European world which Innocent was to rule from

* Stubbs, *Lectures on the Study of Mediæval and Modern History*. Lecture ix. p. 216.

without, and Francis of Assisi was so greatly to move from within, was a disturbed world.

Innocent found the city of Rome itself in its usual confusion, but by wise concessions and extraordinary tact he brought the constant contests which were going on, within reasonable bounds. There were wider fields, however, of enterprise and difficulty which demanded his attention. That wonderful episode in modern history—if we can call anything in history an episode—of the Norman kingdom in Southern Italy and Sicily, had practically come to a disastrous close : the brilliant rule of Robert Guiscard, and after him, of the great King Roger, of his miserable successor William the Bad and his distinguished successor William the Good—this had made for a time part of Southern Italy, and certainly Sicily, a most remarkable kingdom. It had been a kingdom in many respects far in advance of the times ; there had been wise government, a real administration of justice, and a very high development of literature and art : it had shown a remarkable example, unparalleled in the Middle Ages, of the possibility of toleration. Mohammedans and Christians had lived together socially on satisfactory terms under Christian sovereigns ; literature had developed under an inspiration, Arabian not Turkish—but still Mohammedan ; magnificent cathedrals and churches had been raised by Norman sovereigns—the Palazzo Reale at Palermo, its cathedral, Monreale, Cefalu—which combined Christian sentiment and Christian theology with all the peculiar charm and dexterity of Saracenic genius. This state of things was unhappily interrupted on the death of William II. : he had no issue, and his sister Constance had been unfortunately given by him in marriage to the Emperor Henry IV. The son of this marriage, born under extra-

ordinary circumstances and destined to go on to an extraordinary future, was a child at the time of Henry's death. Anarchy broke out in Sicily ; for a time Tancred, an illegitimate heir to the Norman throne, became king. Ultimately the party of Constance triumphed, and the Norman kingdom of Italy and Sicily came thus within the all-embracing grip of the Empire.

Constance had placed her son, who was still a child, under the care of the Holy See. Italy and Sicily had been deluged with Germans, in consequence of the union of what was afterwards called "The Two Sicilies," with the Empire. When Constance became a widow, she entirely separated herself from imperial interests, and determined to throw the cause of her son Frederick into the hands of the leaders of the national movement. She succeeded in having Frederick brought from Iesi, where he had been under the charge of the wife of Conrad of Lutzenburg. She took care that he should be crowned at Palermo ; she disowned the German Markwald of Anweiler, an Alsatian knight who had acted as seneschal to her husband the Emperor Henry, who had called himself Duke of Ravenna, and who had possessed himself of the March of Ancona ; she dismissed German troops, and placed herself practically in the hands of the Pope.

It is the habit of some historians to describe the Pope as taking advantage of the opportunity to extend his power. This is true, *and* it is not true. Innocent at the moment represented the national sentiment of Italy : he felt strongly the necessity of getting rid of the Germans, and of the constant interference of the Empire. By his wisdom and address he destroyed the power of Markwald and succeeded in driving Conrad of Lutzenburg, who had been called Duke of Spoleto, into Germany ; he was equally successful

in forming a powerful league among the Guelph cities ; and if he asserted his feudal position over the "Two Sicilies," and prevailed in inducing Constance to agree to it, it was not merely for the purpose of advancing papal power, but of advancing it for the liberation of Italy from the imperial yoke. Constance died in the November of 1198, and with a motherly anxiety for the welfare of her son Frederick, still a mere child, she appointed the Pope his guardian.* By his remarkable ability, the young Pope within one year of assuming the papal crown, was practically the supreme power in Southern Italy and Sicily, in complete command of the Romagna, and the inspiring force and director of the republican leagues which governed Northern Italy. For a time, at any rate, Italy was more free of the intrigues and interferences of Germany than it has probably ever been until our own days. This was the work of a consummate statesman, who had before his mind a high and religious ideal as to the welfare of the kingdom.

The peace, however, which had been secured by the statesmanship of Innocent was short-lived : there were still troubles hanging over Sicily. Markwald managed to return, and he gained to the side of the Germans the Chancellor Walter, who also managed to hold the Arch-bishopric of Palermo in spite of the Pope. Diephold, the other great German leader, gave further trouble to the Pope, and it was evident that unless some general of ability could be placed in command, the German interest would entirely prevail again. It was then that the good knight, Walter of Brienne, came to the rescue ; his wife, the daughter of Tancred, had by inheritance a right to Tarentum and Lecce ; these had been settled by the

* *Epist. Innocent.* i. 322.

Emperor Henry on the family of Tancred. Walter of Brienne demanded from the Pope the inheritance of his wife ; Innocent agreed to the demand and secured the services of Walter in opposition to Markwald and Diephold and the Sicilian chancellor who headed the German party. In a battle near Palermo, Walter of Brienne won a complete victory, and this victory was followed by others. He defeated Diephold before Capua, drove the Germans before him, and quietly took possession of the greater part of Apulia. The wily chancellor of Sicily —Walter of Troja—had a greater fear of the success of Walter of Brienne than he had of the Germans ; he stirred up the idea in Sicily, and probably in the mind of young Frederick, that the papal rule would abridge the rights of the sovereign and the power of the great nobles. At last he openly joined Diephold, but they both were defeated at Bari by Walter of Brienne ; notwithstanding this, the German party gained considerable success. Markwald, indeed, died at Palermo, but William of Capperone took his place, and held the young Frederick under his own guardianship ; Walter of Brienne was surprised and taken by Diephold, and died of his wounds in 1205 ; Diephold became all-powerful in the kingdom of Naples. If Innocent, however, could not manage completely to drive out the German party, he succeeded by his statesmanship in inducing them to make submission to him and again brought Sicily and Southern Italy to the nearest approach to quietude that they were now likely to enjoy. It was a troubled world ; Innocent had done his best and succeeded, probably beyond what any other man could have done, in securing a measure of justice and peace.

Such peace as it was, was of the most precarious kind,

and the office of the Pope had been hitherto rather to diminish or restrain wars, and to protect Italy and Sicily against the Empire, than to establish anything that we should now call peace. It is worth while for us to remember that during all these troubled years, St. Francis was first preparing for his work, and then carrying it on, and that he had all but embarked in the enterprise of Walter of Brienne. It was only his illness at Spoleto, as we shall see, that, humanly speaking, held him back from following that great leader into Southern Italy. It is impossible to avoid thinking what a very slight thing apparently makes an enormous difference in the history of the world. Had Dante written, as once he seems to have intended, in Latin hexameters, or thrown himself with less simple-minded consistency into the arms of the winning party at Florence, we should never have had the "Divina Commedia;" had Fra Bartolommeo never been arrested in a course of levity and worldliness by the preaching of Savonarola, we should never have had the "Madonna della Misericordia of Lucca" or the "St. Francis before the Crucifix" from his brush; had St. Francis himself not fallen ill at Spoleto, when following Walter of Brienne to Southern Italy, we should have been deprived of the greatest saint and the most impressive religious movement of the Middle Ages.

But the disturbance of the world in which St. Francis had to work, was not confined to Southern Italy and Sicily. Nothing could be more anxious than the state of the Empire in the early days of the pontificate of Innocent. The question of succession to the imperial crown had been more than once a fruitful source of quarrel. Now that Henry was dead, things were in a grave position in Germany. There were various com-

petitors for the throne : the natural heir was the young Frederick, King of Sicily ; he, however, was a mere baby, and it was clearly madness in the then condition of things, to insist on his succession. In the minds of men at that time the idea of the Empire as being an almost necessary part of the natural order of things, was rooted more deeply than it is possible for us at the present time to realise. The great tradition of the Roman Empire had lived on ; it had had considerable stimulus given to it by the reign of Charlemagne. Ideas which root themselves in the minds of men are singularly powerful ; the fiction that the Roman Empire still lasted and was represented by the Empire in Germany, held immense sway over the imaginations and minds of all men at that time. Dante, we know, takes for granted that the Pope must be at the head of spiritual matters, and the Emperor at the head of temporal things. The Papedom and the Empire were compared to the sun and moon. The difficulties in working out these theories induced perpetual friction ; the Popes had grown by degrees to assume that as eternal matters are higher than temporal, and as they were at the head of eternal things on earth, they must necessarily be accepted as arbitrators and guides in temporal matters. Hence it was felt that Innocent III. was well within his rights if he interfered seriously with the succession to the imperial throne.

He has been blamed somewhat unfairly for his action in the matter, and some writers have attributed his conduct to motives of mere personal ambition. He held, however, and other men held at the time, that he had a duty to perform.

There were three candidates for the imperial crown : Frederick, who, as I have said, was a mere infant, the

son of the late Emperor and of whom Innocent was guardian; Philip, the Suabian, also of the House of Hohenstaufen, brother of the late Emperor and uncle of Frederick. Otho, of the House of Brunswick, the second son of Henry the Lion, and therefore the deadly foe of the House of Suabia. To adjudicate between the claims of the three was no easy matter; there was no real right of succession to the throne; the Emperor was appointed by the electoral vote. The influence of the Pope in the matter, however, was felt to be important, and Innocent seems to have done his best. It has been somewhat hastily assumed that he was the guilty cause of the troubles in Germany for some ten or twelve years; this is most unfair.* Those troubles would probably have taken place, no matter what his action had been under the circumstances of the time. With regard to Frederick, he saw at once that it would be folly to place an infant on the throne, above the turbulent princes and prelates of Germany. He further saw that it was most desirable, that if possible the perpetual German interference in Italian affairs, kept up by the fiction of the continued Roman Empire, should cease; that the uniting of the crowns of Sicily and the Empire prolonged this interference and was bad for both; nothing but misery had come upon Sicily by the merging of the old Norman kingdom into the Empire. Some writers have implied that Innocent was scarcely a faithful guardian to Frederick by not upholding his right, or *quasi* right, to become Emperor. Innocent's wisdom in the matter is clearly enough shown by the sorrows that

* "Ten years of strife and civil war in Germany are to be traced, if not to the direct instigation, to the inflexible obstinacy of Pope Innocent III." Milman, *Latin Christianity*, vol. iv. ch. 2.

resulted afterwards from Frederick's succession to the crown, and from Frederick's own fond regrets for his native Sicily.

As to Philip, there was much to be said against him. He seems to have been the most mild and attractive, and at any rate, the least savage of the Suabian house; but he was remembered as being the assistant of his brother, the last Emperor, in his brutalities and cruelties and his persecutions of the Church. It is not unnatural, indeed it appeared to be duty, for Innocent to withstand his succession. Richard of England was the great supporter of Otho, and in the May of 1198 Otho was proclaimed the Emperor at Cologne. He was not elected by so numerous a college of electors as was Philip, but the influence of the Pope was felt to be all-important, and both sides endeavoured to obtain the benefit of it. For a time the Pope seemed to hesitate, but at last he declared for Otho; the result was, the breaking out of a civil war in the Empire, and all sorts of miseries followed for at least ten years. It is said that at last, finding that Otho was practically in the ascendent, the Pope had made up his mind to accept Philip as the rightful heir to the Empire. He has been blamed for this, but there is no evidence for anything except that the Pope received Philip's ambassadors in Rome, and determined—as, indeed, it seems to me he was bound to do—to reconsider the case.* The Gordian knot was cut—if Gordian knot it was—by Philip's death. He was assassinated by Otho of Wittelsbach, from motives of private revenge, at Bamberg on St. Alban's Day. Philip's death was not left unavenged, as his murderer was taken and put to death, but that death

* Cf. Milman, *Latin Christianity*, vol. iv., Book ix. p. 52. Milman, as usual—to be quite fair—makes the worst case he can against the Pope.

seemed to make things more simple, and for the moment at any rate the Empire had a breathing time.

At a diet at Frankfort, Otho was now accepted as undisputed emperor, and in the following year he crossed into Italy to receive the crown at the hands of the Pope. He met the Pope at Viterbo, and was afterwards crowned with immense solemnity by Innocent. Men might have hoped that this would have brought peace, but such was not the case : Otho proved himself a more treacherous and dangerous son of the Church than any of the House of Hohenstaufen. He behaved so disgracefully that at last the Pope was driven to excommunicate him. The excommunication was received with joy in Germany. Otho, who was in Italy, hastened across the Alps ; again there was war, and massacre, and plunder. In 1212, Otho married Beatrice, the daughter of the Emperor Philip, to whom he had been betrothed for long. He hoped by this alliance to propitiate the adherents of the House of Suabia. In consequence, however, things were only worse. Beatrice died within four days of the marriage, and it was believed that she had been poisoned by some of Otho's Italian mistresses.

Meantime the hopes of Germany were now fixed upon Frederick : he was invited to come from Sicily to win the imperial crown. Innocent, who had been opposed to his accession to the Empire because of his extreme youth, now felt that as years had passed on, and circumstances had changed, nothing better could be done. He welcomed him at Rome, and gave him counsel and help. By Frederick's energy and quickness his cause was won ; he reached Constance a few hours before Otho ; the bishop declared in his favour. He was received with acclamation at Basle, and all along through

the Rhenish provinces every one took his part. He was chosen Emperor at Frankfort. The day was decided in reality by the King of France at the battle of Bouvines. Otho was obliged to retire to Brunswick, and he made no further attempts upon the imperial throne. Frederick became undisputed Emperor, and at last, for a time, ended this fatal strife which had turned the European world upside down.

But if the European world in which St. Francis had to work was disturbed in Italy and Germany, it was equally full of turmoil in France and in England. In France, Philip Augustus embroiled himself with the Papacy in a quarrel, in which we are bound to say that Innocent was right and the French king was wrong. The first wife of Philip Augustus had been Isabella of Hainault, and she had died in 1190. Philip determined upon a second marriage a few years afterwards. He had a great desire to draw closer the ties between France and Denmark. Richard of England was detested by Philip, and there seems to have been a vague idea that Denmark possessed from the great Canute some claim upon the crown of England. We are apt to forget that at that time quite one third of France, as we now know it, was subject to the English crown. It would have been a great thing for the French king if he could have established some claim upon the English crown through an alliance with Denmark. Just then it was reported to the French king that the Danish princess Ingeburga possessed a striking attractiveness. Philip at once asked her in marriage. He met her and was married to her at Amiens. The following day the queen was crowned. During the coronation men observed that the king turned pale, and was filled with horror. No one knew what the real

reason was ; various reports were spread abroad,* but the one patent fact was that in spite of her striking beauty, and especially, so we are told, of her long and beautiful hair, the king had conceived an overwhelming aversion to her, and refused altogether to treat her as queen.

The king proceeded accordingly at once to find grounds for the dissolution of the marriage. As strong as his aversion towards Ingeburga, became his passion for Agnes, the beautiful daughter of the Duke of Méran. Everybody admired Agnes, and the courtiers of France took the side of the king. She was a beautiful rider ; there was no sport or pastime in which she could not take her part. She is described as being of exquisite beauty, and besides that, her charm of manner told upon all, even the most severe. Philip meantime was treating his queen in a manner which can only be described as persecution. Ingeburga, who seems to have been a devout and good woman, who had had no direct responsibility in her marriage, was now hurried from convent to convent and prison to prison, and treated with obloquy and insult, simply because she demanded her rights—viz., to be recognised as Philip's wife and queen of France. It is not necessary to dwell upon the ups and downs of this almost interminable quarrel. Philip was a man of insatiable ambition, of a clear statesmanlike eye, but of fierce passions. We are almost inclined to think that the best thing about him was his unswerving fidelity to Agnes de Méran. Sometimes the queen was acknowledged according to her proper rights ; reconciliation, or something that looked like it, took place between her and the king ;

* *Gesta*, chap. xlviij., where it is suggested that the cause was possession of the devil.

sometimes she was driven into a more cruel banishment than ever. At last Agnes de Méran died. The king, in his agony, desiring to win the prayers of the Church for the woman that he really loved, and desiring to have her children made legitimate, had a final, though only external, reconciliation with the queen. He never lived with her as a husband, but at last he gave her the honours due to the queen of France.

In all this miserable business the conduct of Pope Innocent, so it seems to me, was irreproachable. This whole question of the royal marriage threw France into misery. It is usual with certain historians to blame Innocent for the interdict which, in consequence of the sins of the king, he pronounced against the kingdom. We have, however, in justice to remember that the Pope only acted in this matter in unison with the thoughts of the time. It would be, of course, to our minds perfectly shocking that quiet and devout Christians should be deprived of the sacraments of the Church and the ministrations of religion, because of the sins of kings; but then in our days kings are rather names than facts, and our point of view could hardly have been realised in the thirteenth century. No crime of a king or prince in highly civilised nations like our own—however deeply we might deplore it—would make the slightest difference in the action of the Church towards ordinary Christian souls. No Pope now, even in those few nations which still acknowledge his more or less undisputed sway, would dare to issue an interdict on all Christian people, because of the crimes of a king. It was not so in the thirteenth century, and it is as unphilosophical as it is unfair to judge a great man like Innocent III. by the standard of our own times. This ought also to be

remembered, that, with many lower motives likely to induce the Pope to condone the sins of the king, he had the courage and consistency to act upon principle, and to force the King of France at last into a recognition of his duty towards the law of Christ. On the whole, there are few things finer—if we value inflexible principle and a sense of right—than the attitude of Innocent in this terrible struggle.

That attitude was not by any means the attitude of all the French bishops at the moment, although the vigour of the Pope compelled them to obedience; but some of them—as has sometimes been the case unfortunately with bishops since their days—were courtiers and time-servers, and men who considered rather what would be approved in high quarters, than what was consistent with the rulers of the kingdom of God. Greatly to his honour, be it said, that this great Pope stood firm to high principle, in spite of worldly inducements to the contrary, and in spite of the dangerous attitude of some of the French bishops. But this is even more remarkable: the king had complained that his aversion to the queen had arisen from witchcraft, and the Pope had admonished him to use prayer and fasting and alms-giving, to neutralise any danger of that kind that he might feel. But the Pope went farther, and in doing so exhibited his wise common sense. He advised the king that if he could not love his queen, it was his duty to show to her ordinary respect—in fact, to behave to her, as we should say, like a gentleman. Philip did not at once obey, but Innocent never relaxed his remonstrances until he had vindicated the position of the Queen of France. If we weigh the matter impartially nothing can more clearly show the high principles and the strong character of this

great Pope than his dealing with this French difficulty. But, again, it is to be remembered that the whole story brings vividly before our minds the disturbed Europe in which St. Francis had to begin his work.

There were equal, if not greater difficulties with regard to England. During the reign of Richard I. the relations between England and Rome were perfectly friendly ; so much so that, in the questions between Richard and Philip Augustus, the Pope very strongly espoused the cause of Richard. John succeeded to the throne on Richard's death. He made an effort to have his marriage with the daughter of the Earl of Gloucester dissolved, on one of the usual pleas of affinity. Innocent has been blamed for not being equally severe with John as he had been with Philip ; it is quite possible that political motives may have had much to do with this, but it must be remembered in fairness, that the repudiated wife in this case made no sort of objection but entirely acquiesced in the decision. After this, there followed the series of steps taken by John towards the destruction of his own position and power. Normandy was then under the British crown and John, as well as being King of England, held the position of a French baron. By the circumstances of his marriage, after the divorce, he alienated the sympathies of his fellow barons in France ; and so Normandy was lost. He then alienated the sympathy of Innocent by the long quarrel as to the appointment to the See of Canterbury.

In the appeal to Rome, Innocent took distinctly the side of right ; he maintained the rights, well understood at the time, of the monks of Christ Church, to elect to the vacant see. In order, however, to settle the differences between the king and the monks, he pointed out some irregularities of the late election and practically compelled them to proceed

to a fresh election, urging upon their notice Stephen Langton. He was an Englishman, a man of large learning and noble character, one of the greatest archbishops who has ever filled the See of St. Augustine and his appointment speaks well for Innocent. John, however, was intensely enraged ; he showed that extraordinary mixture of violence, weakness, cruelty, and wickedness, which marked him throughout. He seemed to be possessed by some evil demon and to go out of his way to make himself hated by his subjects.* The accounts that we have of his profligacy and rapacity make it difficult for us to imagine how his people endured him for an hour. Innocent laid the kingdom under an interdict, and John himself was excommunicated, and his subjects released from their allegiance to him. It seems to us strange, now, that such things could be done by a Pope ; as a matter of fact, then they were accepted by all men as part of his duty. A weak pope might have hesitated in the matter, or a worldly Pope, for it was of the highest advantage to Innocent to maintain, if possible, the old friendly terms between the Roman see and the English crown, but Innocent was neither weak nor worldly. In the event, his action and the circumstances arising out of it, gave strength to the English feeling of independence and of resistance to any undue aggression from the Roman see, which has been of value all through our history in maintaining the rights of the English Church. Nothing short of Innocent's firmness could have brought to his bearings a man of such monstrous iniquity as John. He made every effort to escape from the inevitable, he even declared his intention of becoming a Mohammedan and joining with the Eastern powers against Christendom ;

* *Wendover*, pp 216-224, &c.

but Innocent was not to be shaken. The king then passed from violent fury to abject fear ; his utter humiliation is well known. This whole course of struggle, in which unquestionably at first the Pope was in the right, although afterwards he played a less upright part, roused the English people and the English barons to that effort for liberty which began in Magna Charta and has gone on throughout the entire reach of our history.

There were other disturbing movements at the time besides those to which our attention has been called. There were troubles in Spain ; there were quarrels between the kingdom of Leon and the kingdom of Castile ; and there were disturbances in Hungary. The striking thing is that in every one of them, from Denmark and Sweden to the South of Europe, the voice of the Papedom was heard with effect. Innocent believed in, and exercised a degree of authority which, it is evident, could not possibly continue, but it is hard to imagine how, in the state of turmoil in which Europe was at the time, there could have been any approximation to justice and right dealing, if it had not been for his interference.

Immense mistakes, as we now can see, were made in the whole matter of the Crusades, which were then always before the mind of Europe. Some benefits and many miseries arose out of them. In the miserable religious struggles in the South of France in the same way, there were great sorrows and great cruelties on all sides, and it is unquestionably a stain on the name of Innocent III. that he, in this case, encouraged persecution. But we need not now discuss his life and character ; it is necessary to call attention to him, because he

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was the central figure at the time. What seems to me most needful is, that we should have vividly before our minds the externally disturbed condition of Christendom, in this century, and should realise how important a part the Church had to play in regard to such disturbances, what her difficulties and faults were, in order to appreciate the work done by St. Francis—a work which could not well have been done without him. If he came into a world externally at strife, even more serious were the interior troubles of the times, and these are what we must now consider.

CHAPTER III

INTERNAL HISTORY OF THE TIMES OF ST. FRANCIS

THE external troubles of any time lie on the surface of history. We can easily read of great wars, and great movements, and quarrels of popes and kings: we desire, however, to go deeper into things, so as to discover the real troubles, as well as the real blessings of any time. This is difficult enough, partly because the great mass of mankind are inarticulate, and historians and chroniclers deal for the most part with what are called great events, and leave us to read between the lines as best we can, and to find out the true state of things by piecing and putting together the sometimes meagre materials at our disposal, and by the exercise upon them of a sympathetic imagination.

A great deal may be done, however, if we take pains. Human nature is very much the same in all times, although the circumstances in which it may be placed vary considerably. We are pretty sure the same kinds of motives, for good or for evil, played upon our forefathers as those which play upon ourselves. Nations start, indeed, with special moral and intellectual outfits, and their characters and modes of action are modified by the occurrences and trials of their career, but putting together all we do know of such occurrences and trials, we are

able, at least to some extent, to realise something of the condition of people, their troubles and their pleasures, in ages so unlike our own, in many respects, as the Middle Ages were.

Then, again, for our present purpose it is of immense importance to remember that there is no influence so strong among mankind as the influence of religion. For better, for worse, it is sure to make all the difference ; it may raise men to the highest thoughts, if it is noble and nobly obeyed, or if it is not worthily represented, may at times do infinite mischief.

The effects of Christianity on the nations of Western Christendom have been, no one can deny, incalculable. It has been justly remarked, for instance, that the effects—always great—varied very much with the national character on which it told. The Greeks, for instance, were the first to welcome it, and they have remained faithful to it with the most unshaken fidelity, through all the vicissitudes of their deplorable fortunes. To them Christianity has been the saviour which lifted them up from a low condition and acted as their comforter midst terrible sorrows. “Here is a race,” says an able writer, “full of flexibility and resource, with unusual power of accommodating itself to circumstances and ready to do so when its interest prompted, not over scrupulous, quick in discovering imposition, and pitiless in laughing at pretence—a race made, as it would seem, to bend easily to great changes, and likely, we should have thought, to lose its identity and be merged in a stronger and sterner political association. And to this race Christianity has imparted a corporate toughness and permanence, which is among the most prominent facts of history so that that easy-going, pliable, childishly changeable Greek

race, at whom the Romans sneered, has proved through the deepest misfortunes one of the most inflexible nationalities that we know of; and that the root of this permanence and power of resisting hostile influences has been in Christianity, and in the Christian Church." *

In the same way, when Christianity met with the northern races, religion seized upon the fresh energies and the austere strength of the barbarians and moulded these into very high virtues. A society which was eventually to develop into high civilisation was formed out of mere chaos. Ideas which had been dimly floating before the minds of men were brought to be actively energetic; civil order with all its blessings was gradually evolved. Wild and almost lawless conquerors were taught to control themselves. Pride was humbled, conscience aroused, splendid instincts purified and trained into virtues, and this was the work of the Christian Church.

And then, again, in dealing with the Latin races the Christian religion showed itself an immense power. "To the serious, practical, hard-natured Roman," says the same writer, "it showed another side, 'love, joy, peace,' an unknown wealth of gladness and thankfulness and great rejoicing. It stirred his powerful, but somewhat sluggish soul; it revealed to him new faculties, disclosed new depths of affection, won him to new aspirations and new nobleness." †

As the Church fell more and more into a settled system, the same work went on. There were, however, as there always have been, times of slackness. Where Christianity relaxed its efforts and where the ministers of the Church failed in their ministry, the nations fell back towards their

* Dean Church, *Gifts of Civilisation*, p. 199.

† *Ibid.* p. 255.

original faults. The thirteenth century was a time of transition; the Catholic Church had immense influence, but she was suffering from very deep disasters. If we bear in mind that of which I have just spoken, the greatness and the need of the influence of Christianity upon national life, we are able to measure the extent of danger to that life wherever such influence is not properly exercised, and to see more clearly what must be the interior troubles of such a time as the century of which we are treating.

There always have been, and there always must be, ups and downs in the history of the Church. In one sense that history has been a history of disappointment and is a familiar illustration of the difference between the ideal and the actual. As a fallen race, we find ourselves from the ignorance and passion and self-will of man, which have made such havoc of our moral and spiritual nature, in the midst of ruins. It has, however, been truly said that these are ruins, "where the work of the re-builder more than overtakes the work of the destroyer. . . . However much we have to correct and amend, the way of amendment is still one of our unforfeited possessions. . . . Besides ruin, no doubt vast and terrible and recurring, there are also remedies for it: unexpected and amazing influences of healing which evil cannot tire out and which can cope with its mischief. Experience and Scripture unite in putting before us this picture; but the Bible holds up to us what history and experience cannot, what nothing in the appearances in this world can warrant, even to the most sanguine—the promise of something final and complete. . . . The great forces of restoration which we see at work under all the disadvantages of our confused and crippled condition are to have their victory at last."*

* Dean Church, *Pascal and other Sermons*, pp. 326-7.

What we have need to remember, then, is this, that St. Francis under the providence of God, was one of these greatest of "forces of restoration." I am not at all sure that justice has been fully done to the extent of the force that he exercised, morally, socially, spiritually ; and I am quite sure that we can never, even approximately, realise how great that force was, unless we, in some measure, understand the ruins with which it had to deal.

In order to understand that, there are at least two great tendencies of his time the effects of which we must not forget.

(1) The Crusades.

We are thoughtless and we are much mistaken, if we allow ourselves to consider the Crusades as mere acts of sentimental folly. Immense movements of that kind, which touch very deeply such vast ranges of human sympathy, can never be explained in that way except by those who do not think. The Crusades have their darker side, indeed, but there is a side of brightness about them, and the moral forces at work which led to them, and the wide consequences which followed from them are intensely interesting.

The Holy Land had fallen under the power of the Moslem ; Christian pilgrims to the scenes of our Saviour's crucifixion and burial had brought to Europe terrible pictures of the barbarous treatment to which they were subjected by those who had acquired power about 1073 over the holy places, and who were no longer, in most cases, the dignified and high-minded Saracens of the past. Europe was moved by these representations. Faith may or may not have been as intelligent as it is now, but faith was simpler. Men were angry that the scenes of the Lord's life and death should be in the

hands, not always of high-minded and generous, but sometimes of brutal and narrow-minded, men. Many motives combined to swell the waves of this anger ; there was, first of all, we must remember, real Christian faith, faith which made men believe absolutely what God had revealed to His Church ; then there was undoubtedly the spirit of romantic adventure ; and then there was a sense, if we are to believe as we must believe what St. Bernard himself said on the subject, a sense of the slighted honour of Christians, a sense which threw that great Father into one of the highest states of feeling of his apostolic enthusiasm, and gave special force to his marvellous oratory, lest the honour of the Christian name should be slighted.

The wave of feeling had been slowly mounting in western Christendom, but it had been surely spreading. It is to the honour—I, for my part, believe—of Pope Urban, that he had given the fullest expression to it at the Council of Clermont in 1095. It is perhaps not wrong to pause for a moment, to remember that nothing can more interest the traveller in the mountains of Auvergne than the sight of Clermont Ferrand under the Puy de Dôme, where the great council was held *à propos* of the Crusades. It was there that the Pope delivered his tremendous discourse upon the sins of Christendom in allowing the holy places to remain in the hands of the infidel. It was there that Europe found vent for its overwhelming enthusiasm in the cry of “God wills it, God wills it.”

I must again recall the fact that it is easy enough to point out the follies and mistakes of the Crusades. It is always easy to be wise after the fact, especially when the fact existed centuries ago ; but, it is to be remembered that,

we can neither understand the spirit of the time nor yet the dangers of the time with which St. Francis had to deal, unless we grasp the mixed motives which led to the Crusades and the consequences which followed from them. They certainly took their rise from many motives which were exceedingly good. Many men who took part in them learnt the meaning of noble and disinterested objects, and rose to very noble thoughts. Many who had been enemies to one another became friends, and certainly, to begin with, there was a great deal of really religious enthusiasm.

The whole period of the Crusades covers about two centuries. They are usually reckoned as seven in number. The first is celebrated by Tasso in his great poem, and resulted in the short-lived Latin kingdom in Jerusalem; the second connects itself with the name and preaching of St. Bernard in 1147; the results of it, however, were disastrous. In 1187 came the third, which was made remarkable by Richard Cœur de Lion, Philip Augustus of France, and the great Saladin. We are all acquainted with it from Sir Walter Scott's "Talisman." The only result of it was the gain of some privileges for the Christian pilgrims. The fifth crusade can hardly properly be called a crusade at all; the real result of it was the taking of Constantinople by the Latins, which with all its miseries and cruelties led, as much as anything could, to the quarrels between the eastern and western Churches. The original mover of this crusade—though he was in no way to blame for its shameful character—was Innocent III. The most important person connected with it towards its close was the Emperor Frederick II. It was through him that Bethlehem was recovered for a short time, but soon after

both it and Jerusalem were entirely lost. The sixth and seventh crusades were entirely due to the energy of the French, and connect themselves with the great name of St. Louis. The first of these began in 1249, and the second some twelve years later, in 1270. In the first of these crusades the saintly King of France was taken prisoner; in the second he lost his life. After this there were some faint efforts at expeditions, but the original enthusiasm was gone. Acre fell in 1291, and its fall marks the complete and absolute end of the whole movement, which had thus occupied two centuries.

In their ostensible object the Crusades were a failure; they were, however, big with results. From them came an immense stimulus to, and, indeed, one may say opening up of, commerce. All sorts of arts and inventions were introduced to Europe from the East. From the Crusades may be dated the rise of European commercial enterprise and to a great extent, therefore, to them is due the existence of such merchants as Bernadone, the father of St. Francis, whose rise as a class so deeply affected the old feudal system. Again, by the Crusades, the great nobles were deeply impoverished, and this led to what may be called the birth of the middle classes. It is true that these wars threw back the Mohammedan power which otherwise might have overrun Europe, and gave rise to much that was noble and poetical and beautiful in the chivalry of the thirteenth century. But on the other hand, men's thoughts and ideas were loosened by them, not only in faith but also in morals; contact with eastern luxury and the Mohammedan system was in many ways not at all improving to Christians. The Emperor Frederick II. was a very exceptional and, indeed, enig-

matical character, and in some respects in advance of his times ; still he represents—so to speak at high-water mark—much that was going on in the minds of men at that epoch, and for some half a century before. He was distinctly a freethinker, and he reminds us that in the century with which we are concerned there was a great deal more “free thinking” and unbelief than we are apt to imagine possible in the “Ages of Faith.” Anyhow, it is to be remembered that from the Crusades there proceeded a freshening of life and a stirring of men’s minds, both for better and for worse, from which arose many of the difficulties with which the movement of St. Francis had to deal.

(2) The second important factor in the condition of things then—so it seems to me—was the state of the feudal system.

To the nobles, whilst this system gave great power, it also was the cause of endless trouble ; it kept things in an unsettled state when men had to live always ready for war, and at the beck and call of their liege lords. Its effect upon the Church, however, at this time was infinitely worse. Here it had become the source of monstrous scandals : bishops and the high ecclesiastics connected with the monasteries had become feudal lords. While the monasteries to a certain extent protected the poor, on the other hand, they themselves, in many instances, were becoming worldly and out of touch with the religion of the people ; men could no longer recognise the followers of Christ in the great feudal bishops. It is strange, but it is necessary to remember that in the earlier part of this century everything was in such disorder that discipline was almost gone ; benefices were handed on in a kind of feudal manner as hereditary property, and that among

an unmarried clergy. There was great licentiousness, there were gross disorders. St. Bernard exclaims, "It is no longer true that the priests are as bad as the people, for the priests are worse than the people." The ordinary clergy and bishops had therefore lost their influence, where influence was most needed, viz., in the towns. We have to remember that at this time the towns were rising into importance; it has been remarked that we are in the habit of thinking of towns as centres of intelligence as contrasted with country places. It was almost exactly the reverse in the thirteenth century. The only real powers for learning and religion were the monasteries which were scattered over the country; in the towns men were more independent but more miserable. They were shaking themselves free, to a certain extent, from the feudal barons; they were beginning to be alive to the meaning of commerce; they were scarcely yet settled into anything like their final shape and power. The clergy and the bishops, from the corruptions I have alluded to, could no longer touch them; the great monasteries—far the best influence at the time—were, for the most part, not near them. Oriental habits and Oriental forms of thought, coming in from the Crusades, more nearly affected them; it was natural, therefore, that they should be hotbeds of every form of heresy and looseness of thought about religion. And one reason why such heresies and wild opinions were likely to take root, is to be found in the sufferings of the people. The unsettlement of the Crusades and the drain upon human life caused by them, as well as the impoverishment of the nobles which inclined them to more stringent oppression—all added to the sufferings, which, under the best conditions, are sure to come into the lot of the lower

working grades of society. Religion was their only comfort, and the great monasteries were still their friends and helpers ; but the increased worldliness among the bishops, and the consequent falling away of the second order of the ministry, either left them without this consolation, as regards the secular clergy, or brought religion itself into contempt with them.

From all these causes, joined to the natural instincts of fallen man, which lead him to rebel against spiritual guidance, innumerable sects arose in this century, especially in Southern France. Their doctrines were of the most varying and fantastic kind, but they had one thing in common, viz., hatred of the Church. They knew nothing of, and cared nothing for, the historical character of Christianity. As in the case of almost all sects which have separated themselves from the Church, there was, to begin with, a real grievance. This was made the most of, sometimes by pious and enthusiastic but uninstructed men, sometimes by self-seekers ; the doctrine, teaching, and even facts of Christianity, were put aside, as they have so often been since, in the interest of a false spirituality.

Among these varying sects there was one remarkable feature. It has ever been a fascinating study to men's minds to try to solve the riddle of the origin of evil. The old theory of the Manichæans rested upon the dual principle, which, put shortly, amounts to this : that God is the Creator of spirit, and the devil the creator of matter. Spirit, therefore, is in itself essentially good, and matter essentially bad. The soul of man consequently is led to all its faults and misfortunes by its union with the body. The body is a wretched prison-house of evil and corruption, and can have nothing good

in it. It is clear that such teaching not only makes short work of Christianity, but also makes short work of fact and morality: (1) of fact, for it is impossible to deny that there are mental and spiritual sins quite as grievous as, or more grievous than, sins connected with the body; (2) of morality, because if such a doctrine be true, the consequences would be, and the consequences have been, either that men have rushed into the wildest asceticism, treating so terrible a tyrant as the body with the most severe measures of repression, or they have rushed into the most unbridled sensuality, considering that it did not really matter what the body might be allowed to do, it is so completely bad.

These doctrines, the doctrines of the early Manichæans, reappeared in Europe at this time in their most extreme forms. Some of the sects were called Paulicians, some Albigenses, some Cathari—that is pure—but whatever slighter variations there may have been among them, their fundamental position was Manichæan, and therefore directly opposed to the existence, the organisation, the sacraments, the doctrines of the Church.

It was right that the Church should waken up and arouse herself to meet these deadly evils. It was very wrong that this was done in the way in which it was done, at least in part.

Innocent III. was a great man and a good and spiritual man, but he was too much imbued with the spirit of his time, and it will always remain a stain upon his memory that he lent his authority to Simon de Montfort and his armies in their crusade against the sects of Southern France. Multitudes perished in the Albigensian war, and perished from the most cruel deaths. The persecution was to a great extent successful at last, at least by the

following century, but the method was a cruel one, as well as in a great measure an unsuccessful one in some respects. It altered the whole face of Southern France. Southern France had had a language and literature and civilisation of its own. All this was injured or destroyed. Northern France henceforth gave its tone to the whole, and much that was graceful and beautiful, as well as what was bad in Provence, perished. It is a sad story, but men at the time hardly understood the meaning of tolerance and the right methods of spiritual warfare. There was one man, however, who lent no hand and gave no countenance to such work ; one who understood that God's battles must be won not by the sword but by the Word, not by persecution and cruelty but by high self-sacrifice, and that man—in these respects so far before his time—was Francis of Assisi.

It is sad enough to see how the system of persecution for religious feeling grew upon the Church ;* it is consoling to see how constantly there was a strong protest against it in the minds of the best men. In the early days, the Church had to endure persecution ; then was the age of the martyrs. After that she had to struggle against heresies ; then was the age of the controversialists. A danger of controversy is to rouse a persecuting temper ; there are, however, things worse than controversy—e.g., indifference—and amidst the age of the controversialists there was still a strong Christian temper which resisted persecution. The best men had, as it has been said, “a profound consciousness that God will accept nothing save the homage of a willing heart.” “No one,” says Tertullian,

* Cf. on this whole question, the beautiful book on “Toleration,” by the present Bishop of London (Bishop Creighton), full of his precision of thought, and of true spiritual power and calm and wise judgment.

"would wish to be venerated unwillingly, not even a man." "It is for us," says Cyprian, "to do our utmost that we may be vessels of gold or of silver ; to God only is it given to break the vessels of clay. The servant cannot be greater than his Lord : no one may take upon himself what the Father has given to the Son only. No one may undertake to purge the threshing-floor or sever the wheat from the tares by human judgment. This is proud obstinacy and sacrilegious presumption springing from wicked anger." "Belief," says Lactantius, "cannot be enforced, for he who lacks piety is useless to God." Other great men in the Church had shown their uneasiness under the idea of persecution as a weapon for advancing truth ; St. Martin of Tours had done so with vigour, in the case of Priscillian and the Emperor Maximus. But the canker spread. Heresy came to be treated as a crime against civil government and the Church put herself into the hands of the world. She suffered for it ; sects learnt the same lesson, and the Calvinists at Geneva and the Independents in North America were as cruel as the Inquisition. "Curses come home to roost," and the Roman Church to this day suffers in the estimation of Englishmen for her complicity in the persecuting sins of the secular power, and men who were cruelly put to death by the State for supposed crimes against the State, are even now looked upon as "martyrs" to Roman fanaticism.

There can be no way of advancing God's truth, except God's way ; it must be carried to hearts and consciences by the loving teachings of those who are full of faith. It was this that was felt so deeply by such men as St. Francis. Around him he found a world full of sorrow, wretchedness, and sin. He saw society dislocated by all sorts of

terrible forces ; he was not the man to discuss whether this came from the Crusades or from the feudal system, or indeed from what second cause it came. His was one of those noble and simple natures which gain the highest gifts of genius by receiving the " wisdom which cometh from above." He loved God and he loved God's world because it was God's world, and he therefore loved everything in it ; the birds, the beasts, the fishes, the winds, the clouds, the showers, because God had so ordained them ; he loved his fellow men, both because they were his fellow men and also because the Lord who had loved him so, and whom he so loved, was one with them in His humanity, and willing to die for them on the cross. He never dreamt of systems of persecution, or systems of government ; his first and clear thought was to be, to the utmost of his power, like his Master. He felt that example was better than precept, and that precept would tell if example supported it. He found a confused and terrible and suffering time around him, and with his high, chivalrous spirit, his utter unselfishness and his indomitable courage, he went out to it, to save it as far as he could by being an *alter Christus*—another Christ. God would guide him from step to step, and God did guide him, so that it is impossible to exaggerate the immense good which he did to multitudes of souls in his time, a thing which cannot be measured until the last reckoning ; but also, it is impossible to exaggerate the benefits he conferred upon the Church and upon his age.

It may be necessary to remember some of the after sorrows of the Order he founded, but if we enter at all into the thought of the interior difficulty of the time which I have endeavoured to sketch, we will have begun to realise in some measure how great a force

was needed to console the suffering and give hope to the despairing, and to awaken in some degree the Church from her dreams of ease and self-indulgence to a fuller sense of the meaning of her mission and the reality of another world. It was in Francis of Assisi that that force, as we shall see, was found.

CHAPTER IV

THE EARLY DAYS OF ST. FRANCIS

THE career of any man must be, to some extent, affected by surrounding circumstances. The time and place of his birth affect his character and career in some measure, as well as the natural inheritance which comes to him from his parents and ancestors. Of the state of the time in which St. Francis entered the world, I have already said something. A word here on his birthplace may not be amiss.

On leaving Rome and travelling northward, after passing the wild stretches of the Roman Campagna, soon after leaving Civita Castellana behind, the traveller enters upon a mountainous region of a striking character. There is a steady ascent from the banks of the Tiber to the crests of the Apennines, and there is still maintained on the whole, the form of a long, deep, almost oblong valley, guarded by mountain peaks. It is a district, shut off thus by itself, picturesque and wild, and enjoying a fresh and delightful atmosphere, even in the heats of summer. Such is Umbria. It has been justly described* as having a sort of Alpine grandeur without the severe climate of the mountains of eternal snow. The rocks are rugged, the precipices bold, the crests and cornices

* By Ozanam, *Les Poëtes Franciscains*.

of the hills overhanging, but there is a vegetation of the South, and with the gnarled oak and pine intermingle the vine and the olive. The whole district is grand without being terrible, and sweet and attractive although stern and craggy. It is filled with picturesque old cities, rich in historical or religious associations—Narni, Terni, Spoleto, Foligno—some of them hanging on the edges of the mountains, some nestling in the secluded corners of the valleys. The valley, which in the midst of this extensive tract of country opens out with special features of its own, is the most beautiful in Umbria. It is guarded by bold yet graceful mountains, and watered by abundant streams. At its southern extremity is Foligno, at its northern Perugia, to the west are some little towns, among them Bevagna, the birthplace of Propertius, to the east Assisi, ever memorable as the birthplace of St. Francis. The noble church which now gives so much character to the city and bears the great saint's name, was not there, of course, when he first saw the light, but otherwise the general lie and appearance of the place, in its primitive mountain simplicity, must still give to the traveller a very just idea of what it was when St. Francis trod its streets as boy and man.

Dante himself was moved to more than usual warmth by the thought of such sacred ground as Assisi, and so well may we. It is thus he writes :

" Between Tupino, and the wave that falls
From blest Ubaldo's chosen hill, there hangs
Rich slope of mountain high, whence heat and cold
Are wafted thro' Perugia's eastern gate;
And Nocera with Gualdo, in its rear,
Mourn for their heavy yoke."*

It was in this place that the saint was born. Could

* Cary's Translation.

Providence have ordained a more beautiful birthplace ? The scene which from Assisi presented itself daily to his youthful eyes must have had, did have, as we know, a lasting effect upon his mind. From thence the eye surveys a noble coronet of stately mountains. You look from Radicofani above Trena, to Monte Catria, famous as the scene of some of Dante's saddest times of solitude, and ever is the eye satisfied with the grace and grandeur of the curves of mountain outline, and the changing hues of an incomparable sky. There are rivers and cities and lakes—from Thrasymene, just hidden by a line of crests to the Paglia and Tiber beneath, where Orvieto crowns its severe and lonely rock. With the changing lights and shadows always beautiful in the vivid spring or burning summer, tender-tinted autumn or clear and sparkling winter, with the bright and pure and buoyant atmosphere always giving life and vigour, what spot on earth more fitted as the birthplace of the saint who was, above all things, bright and tender and strong ?

“ Upon that side,
Where it doth break its steepness most, arose
A sun upon the world, as duly this
From Ganges doth: therefore let none, who speak
Of that place, say Acesi; for its name
Were lamely so delivered; but the East,
To call things rightly, be it henceforth styled.”*

Here St. Francis was born in the autumn of 1181. There appears to be some doubt as to the exact date—perhaps arising in some measure from the changes in the calendar from the old to the new style. At Assisi the anniversary of his birth is observed on September 26. The date adopted in the Roman calendar is October 4.

* “Paradiso,” canto xi. Cary’s Translation.

His father's name was Pietro Bernardone, his mother's name was Pica. By the father's side he was descended from the Mariconi, a mercantile family of Lucca. Cristofani, the historian of Assisi, disputes this and maintains, but without adducing satisfactory evidence, that the family was originally from Assisi. The testimony of Octavius, Bishop of Assisi, seems decisive. He relates that when preaching the Lent course in the Cathedral at Lucca in 1689, he was shown by one of the canons an ancient and authentic manuscript, in which he read the following: "There were at Lucca two brothers, merchants, named Mariconi. One of the two remained in the country, the other named Bernard, went and settled at Assisi, and was surnamed Bernardone. He then married and had a son whom he named Pietro. Pietro, being heir to a handsome fortune, obtained the hand of a young girl of noble family named Pica, and was the father of St. Francis."* This is all the more probable because Lucca alone of Italian cities at the time was remarkable for its manufactures in fine material, and the Moriconi were distinguished manufacturers and merchants.

Of his mother, Pica, we know little except that she was of noble family, of great beauty, and is said to have come from Provence. This latter statement we may the more readily credit, both from her beauty—as the Provençal women, especially the Arlesiennes, have always been renowned for their loveliness—and also from St. Francis' knowledge of, and love for, the Provençal language and poetry of the time.

Various legends of more or less authenticity, have, of course, gathered round the first days of the child's life.

* *Lumi Serafici de Portiuncula.* Emprinted in Venice, 1701.

It is said, for instance, that his mother had suffered much before his birth, and that a mysterious pilgrim, in return for alms given by the servants of the house, told them that their mistress would find relief and comfort if her child were born in a stable. The hint was taken, the mother was removed to a neighbouring stable, and there among the oxen, and in the straw, her firstborn son was born. The stable to which this legend is attached has been converted into a chapel, still to be seen at Assisi, and known by the name of "Francesco il Piccolo." Above the door is the inscription :

" Hoc oratorium fuit bovis et asini stabulum
In quo natus est Franciscus, mundi speculum."

Songs of angels were said to have been heard in the night, chanting with joy.*

So, too, it was said that prophecy had not been silent, and a forerunner had not been wanting. Joachim, Abbot of Fiora, in Calabria, had ten years before, in commenting on Isaiah, foretold that Umbria and Spain would give birth to two new orders destined to carry the torch of the Gospel everywhere.† It was said also that for some time before the birth of the saint a common man with a strange and inspired look had traversed the streets of Assisi, crying aloud, "Pax et Bonum"—"Peace and Blessing."‡

* See *Acta Sanctorum*, Oct. 4, p. 557, where the legend is wisely examined and rejected; also Wadding, *Annales Minorum*. This is a work of great interest. The style is beautiful, and the arrangement is good. Wadding, however, with all his care and learning, had not examined the most important documents, and, hence, he makes many mistakes. Still his eight folio volumes of St. Francis and the early Franciscans form a great work, and one full of interest and instruction.

† *Acta Sanctorum*, May 29.

‡ *Liber Conform.*, tom. ix. p. 2.

When the time of his baptism came—probably the very day of his birth—Pica, from devotion to the beloved disciple, desired that he should be called Giovanni. According to a tradition of Assisi, on the day of baptism a stranger of severe and venerable appearance requested to hold the child at the font. He fixed on the child a look of divine joy and after the ceremony disappeared, leaving the print of his knees on the stone on which he had knelt during the prayers. This step and the baptismal font are still shown in the cathedral of Assisi, and on the latter have been engraved the words :

"Questo è il fonte dove fu battezzato il Serafico
Padre san Francesco."

It was said also that on the return from the baptism another stranger asked to see him, took him in his arms, gazed upon him with looks of love and tenderness, kissed him, signed him with the cross upon his shoulders, and having told those in charge of the child to take great care of him, for that he was destined to high things, and would become one of the most perfect servants of God in the world, disappeared.*

There is something very beautiful and attractive in these touching traditions. There is nothing incredible in them to those who believe in the constant and consistent action of a good God. The general tendency of an age deeply materialistic as our own is to disbelieve entirely in the reality and nearness of another world, and indeed in God's power or willingness to signalise his special presence and love in his saints, but even if these touching legends be not literally historical,

* Wadding, *Annales Minorum*.

they are a witness to the deep sense of St. Francis' sanctity in the mind of his contemporaries, and to their intense feeling of his close likeness to his divine Master.

Pietro Bernardone had been absent on commercial business in France when the child was born. On hearing the news he hurried his return. He was happy at the birth of the boy, looked well at the little one, and at once changed his name to Francesco, or Francis, probably as a compliment to his beautiful wife. It is said that this was the first time a name (since then so well known) was used, and Pietro certainly believed that he had the honour of inventing it. "Little did the obscure cloth merchant think," so it has been well said, "that this name of his invention would be invoked by the Church, and borne by kings."*

We know little of the years of St. Francis' childhood. Only one biographer has told us anything of them. He was reared in the quietude and tenderness of a loving home, and if men saw a likeness to the opening days of the Saviour at Bethlehem, they also have noticed a parallel to the hidden life at Nazareth. His mother was tenderly attached to him, and doubtless it was she—while his father was engaged in his absorbing business—who had, as was natural, the early training of the child. It is natural to believe that, like many of God's great servants, he owed much to his mother. That lovingness which always was a striking feature of his character, his gentle courtesy, his kindness to the poor, his constant reverence for religion, and his sweet purity of mind and heart—these may well have been, under God's grace, due to his

* Ozanam, *Les Poëtes Franciscains*, p. 58. *Tres Socii*, 1-4, and ii. *Acta Sanctorum*, p. 725.

mother's loving influence, while the foundation of his determined constancy and decision of character was probably an inheritance from his father. When still a child he was sent to attend a school conducted by the priests of the neighbouring church of San Giorgio. The good fathers developed his character, and taught him what they could. He had a quick intelligence, and is said to have learnt Latin and French with ease. The latter he may well have learnt as it was probably his mother's language. St. Bonaventura implies that he did not learn much, and was wanting in culture, but this judgment may merely have originated in St. Francis' own references to his ignorance, a statement quite probably having its grounds in his deep humility.

He was only about fourteen years of age when he was, as we should say, "taken into the business" by his father. At this he showed himself quite at home. His father was much pleased with him. He was quick, intelligent, prudent, affable, and pleasant in manner, with, to use a common phrase, "a head on his shoulders," and very attractive. The consequence was that his father treated him with entire confidence, and exhibited towards him the greatest generosity. This enabled Francis to follow his tastes to the utmost, and placed him for a time in grave temptations, which few lads could have borne so well.

Now was the very height of the age of chivalry. "Courts of Love"—i.e., societies for chivalrous performances—were on the increase. Four of the greatest troubadours of Provence, Bernard de Ventadour, Cadenet, Raimbaud de Vagueras, and Pierre Vidal were living at this time in the northern and central courts of Italy.* In Lombardy, in

* Fauriel, *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, iv. p. 30.

Sicily (among the Normans), in the lesser central courts, chivalry and the movement of the troubadours were all on the increase. The movement seized upon the imaginations and aspirations of the young, and naturally on Francis. He took the lead at Assisi. He formed a "court." His personal charm and his ample means gave him great opportunities. He was the leader of the young men, his contemporaries, with whom he associated himself in "the gay science," sang the songs of the troubadours, conducted their processions in the streets and took the chief place in their banquets.

There were those who threw themselves into this movement whose lives were far from irreproachable, but it was otherwise with him. He was gay and bright, full of the romance of love and chivalry, but his character was not weakened nor his nature soiled. If he loved pleasure and gave himself to amusement he led a life of temperance and spotless purity. St. Bonaventura speaks of him as guarded by God with peculiar care, so that the flesh afterwards to bear the stigmata of the Saviour was kept in virgin purity.*

The next event of importance noticed by his biographers was the part he took in the war with Assisi. The great movement for the freedom of the communes had begun in Italy before Francis' birth. The struggle between the Empire and the communes was fierce and long. Assisi had struck for freedom as early as 1177, in opposition to the Duke of Spoleto and Count of Assisi (Conrad von Urslingen) who was the Emperor's deputy. At this time, Perugia had been beguiled by the feudal nobles with a bribe of greater power, to desert the cause of the cities. The two cities had long been rivals

* *Vita. Acta Sanctorum*, p. 744.

and this treachery to the cause of freedom led to a further outbreak between them. Assisi marched to the attack with flying colours.* Francis was among her soldiers. The battle was long and bloody. Perugia was victorious. The leading knights and Francis—who was not a knight, but as an important burgess was treated as such—were taken and thrown into prison. For a year this imprisonment lasted. During that time he endeared himself to all by his patience and brightness and sweetness, when others were morose and broken-hearted from their misfortunes. When others were severe he was indulgent; when others were gloomy and moody, he was ever bright and full of sunshine. Well is he called by an old writer, “le débonnaire jouvencel.”†

After his imprisonment, for several years, he seems to have gone gently on at his usual business with his father. In 1205 he had a severe attack of illness. Like St. Ignatius Loyola, his hours of suffering seem to have been hours of teaching from God. This illness aroused him. He had been dreaming through life.

With a sweet and sunny nature, doing no ill, but quite indefinite in aim, and “at sea,” like many another of his age since his time, as to the purpose of life, he now determined to live and act, if only he could discover the true road for his journey. His biographer tells us that when convalescent he had hastened out to enjoy once more the beauties of Nature which had meant so much to his sensitive temperament, but he found to his astonishment that now that he had looked so closely on death and on another world, what once seemed so satisfying in

* “Cristofani,” vol. i. pp. 83-5.

† *Vie et Legende de Monsieur Saint Francois.*

Nature seemed cold and sad.* Henceforth he determined to live and act. In such a nature there was a noble ambition. As yet he knew not the direction in which God meant it to move him, and believed that it was to worldly honour. His loving heart, however, did not grow less generous. Meeting, so we are told, about this time, a noble looking soldier of fallen fortunes who was miserably clad, he insisted on changing garments with him and giving him his own splendid apparel. He had ever in him that lovely trait of character, the romance of sacrifice. It was about this time also that he was moved by a wonderful dream, commemorated afterwards by the genius of Giotto in the upper church at Assisi. He saw a stately palace filled with splendid armour, marked with the sign of the cross. "For whom," he asked, "are these arms and this palace?" A voice answered him, "For thee and thy soldiers."† From the dream he arose full of confidence, but quite convinced that prowess in military achievements was the way of glory marked out for him. Circumstances for the moment encouraged him in this belief.

War had broken out, as we have already seen, in Southern Italy. On the death of Henry VI., who had inherited the kingdom of Sicily through his wife, Constance, the heiress of the Norman king, his son, still a minor, his natural heir, had been entrusted by his mother to the guardianship of the Pope. The German nobles were opposed to this, and they supported Markwald, a noble holding office under the late Emperor, to claim the guardianship himself. Hence the war. The national party supporting the Pope were at first the losers. At last the cause was taken in hand by Walter de Brienne—the

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita prima*, cap. i.—*Acta Sanctorum*, p. 685.

† Legend of the *Tras Socii*—*Acta Sanctorum*.

“gentle count” as he was called—the flower of French chivalry. He soon carried all before him. He defeated the Germans at Capua and at Cannæ, and his praises were sounded from end to end of Italy. When a knight of Assisi determined to join his standard, Francis with great joy prepared to follow him as an esquire. His march, however, was not a long one; at Spoleto he was seized with a fever and had to take to his bed. Here, in vision, he believed himself to have been warned of God to return to Assisi and there wait for divine guidance, as he was not intended for military enterprise. It is characteristic of the man, that in spite of the mortification he was sure to feel in returning upon his steps, he did not hesitate to obey.

Life for him seemed again to run in the old channels, but a change had come. Little by little he separated himself from the gaieties of bygone days. It was noticed that more and more he sought retirement for prayer. More and more “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” became a real, living, and beloved person to him, realised and known. He had always been charitable and kindly, but now the poor became his constant care. His alms increased to a degree of the most entire self-denial. He grasped the thought, so powerful among those of any piety in the Middle Ages, that the poor are God’s ambassadors and representatives of Christ, who “though He was rich yet for our sake became poor.” He loved their simplicity, their gratitude, their simple sorrows, as contrasted with the ostentation, selfishness, and pride of the rich. He began to take a keener interest in the work of the Church, and in many ways to help the poorer clergy.

Onward from this, we hear of his steadily advancing course of self-denial and prayer. To have complete

command of himself, and give up all that hindered him from doing the will of God, was his great desire. He so deeply studied the character of our Lord that he was drawn with a positive enthusiasm to poverty. Fearing lest he was trying to act beyond his strength, he made a pilgrimage to Rome to the Tomb of the Apostles,* and there changed his dress with a common beggar, and begged for alms for his support. Returning to Assisi he gave himself to kindly offices to the lepers so abundant at the time. These wretched outcasts from society had been, to Francis' naturally fastidious nature, objects of loathing and aversion, but he taught himself to love them for Christ's sake. In his closing years, as we shall see, he looked upon this self-conquest as a special mark of God's mercy and converting grace. But, again, the heart of all this desire for penance, this struggle for complete self-command and entire surrender to the will of God, was a deepening and passionate love for Jesus Christ.† It is easy for us in our low-level Christianity to call this "exaggerated" or "grotesque." If we do so we are thoughtless, we are unreal, we are presumptuous. We should "hush ourselves to silence," and learn the miracles of God's working in the marvellous men He has from time to time raised up to do His work. "Mirabilis Deus in sanctis tuis!" "O, God, wonderful art Thou in Thy saints!" we may well exclaim.

Pretence, affectation, hysteria, have before now put on a garb of exalted devotion; but these soon reveal their true character and pass away. In Francis a devotion to the crucified Saviour, which could throw him at times

* Cf. *La Vie et Legende*, p. 10; Bossuet, *Panegyric of St. Francis of Assisi*; St. Bonaventura, c. i. 14.

† St. Bonaventura, c. i. 12.

into an agony of tears,* was joined with hiddenness of spirit, deep humility, unselfish love of others, indomitable constancy, and that strong common sense—the mark of the saints, *par excellence*—the common sense of eternity.

In these early days we recognise the true conversion of heart to God—the first step to deep and real sanctity. “Except ye be converted and become as little children,” our Lord said, “ye cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Conversion is sometimes slow and gradual, sometimes apparently (but only apparently) sudden, but there would appear to be a time in the life of every serious soul when there is a special turning to God, when the soul realises and grasps the beauty of religion, the greatness of goodness, the unsatisfying character of passing things, and when God and eternity become to it the governing realities. So it appears to have been at this time with St. Francis.

But there was more. Besides conversion, there is, to be noted in God’s demands, the time and circumstances of His call. That God has special calls for His children we cannot doubt. The really serious point is, How do we respond to them? The Bible, it has been truly said, is a book of “calls.”† Half its interest is to be found in the history of souls who have been called of God and have listened and obeyed or disobeyed. It is (do we not feel?) a part of God’s mysterious government of His Church that calls have their special meaning and special power, but that they may be disregarded or may be obeyed. In the case of St. Francis, there was still much preparation needed, and time was still to elapse before the full meaning of his calling came to him.

* *Tres Socii*, c. i. 14.

† *Dean Church, Human Life and its Conditions : The Call of God.*” p. 174.

There is about this time the beautiful story of the half-ruined church of St. Damian at Assisi. It was dilapidated and neglected, though the Mass was still said there, and a parish priest was still in charge. It was in this church, and while praying before a painting of the Crucifixion, that St. Francis believed himself to be specially called by God to repair the ruins of His church. To those who profess to believe in the call of Samuel, there is nothing remarkable in this. He was evidently *called*, and he acted with a simple heart of loving obedience, which brought its reward, although at first he scarcely understood the full significance of God's will.*

It was then that St. Francis loaded a mule with rich stuffs, sold them at Foligno, and gave the money for the restoration of St. Damian. An attempt has been made by some modern biographers to represent this as an act of dishonesty. Nothing is farther from the truth. Francis was entirely above-board in his action. He shared with his father complete command of their commercial enterprises, and the effort is only an example of a not uncommon form of modern prejudice or stupidity in dealing with the facts of the Middle Ages. That his father was incensed in the highest degree there can be no doubt. He tried, by the aid of friends, to draw his son back from what would be looked upon as a state of fanaticism. It was then that Francis withdrew to a cave in the hills for a month for prayer and meditation, and nearness to God.

The results, in his domestic relations, were disastrous. His father was exceedingly annoyed, and we cannot wonder. He acted, *mutatis mutandis*, just as a thoroughly

* *Tres Socii*, c. i. 13 C; St. Bonaventura, c. ii.; Bossuet, *Panegyric on St. Francis of Assisi; La Vie et Légende*, c. 2.

worldly man would act now when he found that—contrary to the customs of society and the country—his son really loved God. Francis was at once treated with great harshness and thrown into prison. He had inherited from his father the greatest of great gifts when filled, as in his case, by the grace of God—a strong will. There is something almost comical in the contention of some historians who represent a system, which is the denial of the supernatural and, in fact, the religion of the natural man. They wish to take sides against Francis. The way, however, is barred by our Lord's own words. Much as some men may dislike them, they cannot deny them : “ He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me.” Francis' mother felt, as was natural, for her boy, and released him from prison. On his return, his father was as angry as ever. The conflict, however, had now reached its final stage. Francis had been quiet and gentle, temperate and considerate, but he had at last reached “ the meeting of the two ways.” He told his father respectfully but decidedly, that nothing could induce him not to devote himself, heart and life to Jesus Christ, that—come what might—he would give himself up to the mission to which the Lord had called him.

We are all probably familiar with the story of how the magistrates refused to interfere ; of how the bishop heard the father's appeal ; of how Francis quietly stripped himself of all his clothes and all his remaining money, laid it at the feet of the bishop, asked him to give it to his father, and henceforth renounced his father and all family ties, for the service of God.*

* *Tres Socii*, c. ii. 18, 19, 20 ; *St. Bonaventura*, c. ii. 18, 19, 20 ; *Wadding, Annales Minorum de Francisci Conversione*, 5, xxvi., xxvii., xxviii. ; *La Vie et Légende*, pp. 15, 16, 17.

Henceforth—it is worthy of notice—we hear no more of the rich, commonplace, self-seeking Bernardone, except as the father of that great man with whom he had quarrelled, and who moved Europe to its very depths.

Such are the ways of God ! The wise, worldly, common-sense merchant—the idol, the ideal, of shallow, unreal Christianity, is dead and buried. His very name would have perished but that he was the father of one of the greatest men who ever lived, of one to whom worldly connections are as nothing compared with the facts of the kingdom of Christ. God's ways are not our ways. Bernardone is the prudent, ordinary man of the world—he is dead and forgotten. Francis, his son, lives for eternity, acts on the principles of Christ ; he will never be forgotten so long as there is a sense of the greatness of goodness, so long as there is vitality in the Christian Church.

We cannot doubt that the relation of father to son and son to father is one of the most sacred on earth, whether it be natural or spiritual ; highest if it be both, but also of the gravest importance if it be natural ; we have been reminded by a great writer that the duty of the child towards the father is, on the whole, only bounded by the act of Isaac or of Iphigenia ; that the father's duty is "not to provoke the child to wrath lest he be discouraged ;" that that child is blessed who has a father who understands his duty towards him, and who himself recognises his duty towards, and venerates, his father ; and that that father is blessed who understands how to guide his child, recognises his individual personality, and feels the necessity of realising at the proper time that the child is passing into the man. Where this is so, the child will ever be, in one

sense, a child, and full of veneration for his father ; and the father will ever be a guide and a venerated friend. The whole thing lies within the statement of our Lord : "Call no man father upon earth, for one is your Father in heaven." The principle involved is that there is one source of life, that each soul is a personal being ; that parents are to be venerated because they are the means of that life and the shadows of that power, and that they are to recognise their responsibility, and respect the personal life of their child, because by their means it comes from the source of all life. When parents forget this, or when children forget it, there is failure in duty on one side or the other.*

Pietro Bernardone failed in a true conception of the office of a father, and so Francis, obedient to the call of his heavenly Father, was forced, with abundant pain, to renounce his earthly.

When the well-known scene to which I have alluded was over, the Bishop of Assisi did what he could. He clothed Francis in the garment of a servant, upon which Francis himself marked a cross. It was winter, the winter of 1207, but there seem to have been the first signs of the spring. He did not return at once to the rebuilding of his beloved church, St. Damian, but wandered in the woods round Assisi. Like St. Paul, after his conversion, he desired to be alone with God. He was treated, we are told, with indignity as a madman by some robbers who met him, but in his high state of spiritual exaltation, rejoiced in suffering.† He wandered to a monastery, where he was employed as a servant in the kitchen. Shortly after this we find him at Gubbio,

* Cf. Ruskin, *Mornings in Florence. Before the Soldan*, pp. 71, 72.

† St. Bonaventura, c. i. 21 ; Wadding, *Annales Minorum*, 6, i. ii.

visiting an old friend of his worldly days, who gave him some sort of clothing which was greatly needed.

There were few persons at the time more utterly miserable than the lepers. These unfortunate beings were necessarily separated from all social ties. The prevalence of leprosy in Europe in that century may be accounted for partly, I suppose, from conditions of cleanliness and sanitation very different from those of our own times. From whatever cause leprosy was unquestionably prevalent, and it was viewed naturally enough with the utmost horror. In the old days of his gaiety and worldliness, and with his special sensitiveness of nature and feeling for all that was beautiful, Francis had had an instinctive repugnance to this unhappy class. They were banished from all social intercourse ; they were, in fact, a race in themselves. Men did what they could for them, so to speak, at a distance. Lazar-houses were provided for them near the great cities,* but theirs was a living death.† The Church even had a solemn and terrible service for their seclusion from mankind.‡ The horror that was felt at the time towards this terrible disease was heightened by a religious feeling that it was typical of sin. The very nearest and dearest forsook

* In most cities in Italy there were lazarus-houses. See Muratori, *Antiquitates Italicae*, i. 907.

† Cf. Rotharis *Leges*, cap. i. clxxvi., apud Muratori: *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, tom. i. part ii. p. 28.

‡ See Martene, *De Antiq. Eccles. Ritibus*, iii. chap. c. 10; Cf. Chavín de Malan, *Histoire de St. Francois d'Assise*, chap. iii. pp. 62-66; the ceremonial varied a good deal according to times and places. Cf. also *Happy: The Leper's Bride in Demeter and Other Poems* by Tennyson, and the note there by Boucher-James, where it is stated—which is interesting—that "the Church decided that the marriage tie was indissoluble, and so bestowed on these unhappy beings this immense source of consolation."

them,* and though they were treated with a certain kindness and compassion, it was the compassion and kindness that could alone be shown by persons who held aloof from them.†

It was very different with Francis. Just because they were miserable, just because they were forsaken, this fastidious and sensitive young man—who was, so to speak, intoxicated with the love of Christ—gave himself to their succour. He overcame his natural loathing, and for some time in the lazarus-house at Gubbio devoted himself with entire abandonment to their care. He not only tended them, nursed them, and comforted them, but he showed them the warmest affectionateness. He dressed their sores, which men would not touch, and even kissed them. He washed their feet, and did his best to console them in their loneliness.‡ There is a beautiful story recorded by contemporary writers, that one leper to whom he had shown special mercy and kindness, disappeared after blessing him, and men believed that it was our Lord, remembering His saying, “He that hath done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, hath done it unto me.”§ One thing is absolutely certain—that the moral miracle of his divine charity moved all men, and that such things wakened up his contemporaries to believe in the reality of Christian love.

* But, *ibid.*, it is also true that “with a love stronger than this living death, lepers were followed into banishment from the haunts of men by their faithful wives.”

† Cf. *Monumenta Franciscana*. Brewer’s preface, p. xxii.

‡ St. Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln, is said to have done the same. Wendover iii. 158.

§ *Tres Socii* xi. Thomas of Celano, 17; St. Bonaventura, cap. i. 11-13, chap. ii. 22, and Brewer’s preface *Monumenta Franciscana*, pp. xxi.-xxviii. on the whole subject, and St. Bernard: “Easter Sermon,” tom. i. p. 903; also Xavier de Maistre, *Le Lépreux de la cité d’Aoste*.

It must be remembered that such action was not merely the isolated outcome of a specially kind heart. St. Francis is never properly understood so long as men talk of him as a mere "enthusiast," or as acting in a manner that is "grotesque." There has been too much of this; it has arisen from an insufficient knowledge of history, and insufficient thought of the meaning of history. It is true that St. Francis' ways were not our ways, partly because he was an especially great man and an original genius, and one gifted with exceptional sanctity; partly also because he lived under totally different conditions from those under which we live. It is merely shallow thinking to expect to find in the thirteenth century things which would be quite appropriate in the nineteenth century. If we are to understand the greatness of such a man, we must throw ourselves into his times—as I have before pointed out—and consider not what would be wisdom now, but what was wisdom then.

If this is done we are sure to waken up to the fact, too much forgotten, that he was not merely an amiable enthusiast, but in the highest sense a great statesman. He is a remarkable instance of really statesmanlike qualities being developed from entire simplicity of character and the love of God. We shall have many occasions in which to notice this, but meantime it may be wise to dwell upon it in connection with the leper question.

It was one of the great social difficulties of the time; the disease itself came from the East, and doubtless was greatly increased by all the circumstances attendant upon the Crusades. As I have said, miserable lodging, insufficient clothing, and bad food helped it on; it became a question of serious importance from its extreme virulence and extension in this century. There were three things which

marked it and added to its gravity : (1) it was highly infectious ; (2) it was revoltingly loathsome ; (3) even though some were better fed and clothed than others, it had no respect of persons. The horror of it was felt as well in the court as in the cottage or mud hovel : it came apparently without any warning, and it could never be cured. The only way which occurred to men at the time was rapid amputation, if it appeared in one limb ; and we have to remember that, in an age when anæsthetics were unknown and medical science in its infancy, amputation meant most agonising torture, and, in fact, cruel butchery ; even if resorted to it did not always succeed. The only other expedient which men were capable of devising then was entire banishment from mankind. The leper lost all his rights ; he had no home, except the lazarus-house ; he had no occupation ; he was forbidden to approach the haunts of mankind ; he had no civil rights, even the right of making a will, or handing on his property ; once he fell ill of this terrible disease, all his acts were void in law, and he was, in the eyes of the Church, practically an excommunicated person. To suffer from this disease was absolute degradation ; even the charitable, who helped the lazarus-houses, write in a tone which shows the same pious horror of leprosy, as though it were a special mark of God's judgment. It is thus, for instance, that a benefactor to the lazarus-house of St. Julian at Hereford writes : "Seeing that among all infirmities, disease of the leprosy is more disgusting than any, and they who are visited with this disease, at all times and places, ought to present themselves in more humble garb and gesture, as more contemptible and humble than the rest of their fellow men, according to the words of the Lord in Leviticus, 'Whosoever is stained

with leprosy shall rend his garments and go bare-headed; etc."* It is evident then, that the wisdom of the time, medical and social, was entirely at fault in view of this tremendous and increasing social evil; to close the eyes to it, to shut unfortunate sufferers out, to treat them as though they were especially marked as sinners, like those on whom the tower of Siloam fell, was the only thing they could think of.

To a man like St. Francis, this seemed in the first place totally contrary to the spirit of Christ. What is more, the divine light within him gave him the ability to see how important it was for mankind that it should be treated otherwise. He not only did it himself but he insisted that as part of his rule, the leper question should be dealt with thoroughly.† Men of all ranks entered the Franciscan Order. In the First Order, there were especially men of culture, of considerable means when in the world, and of noble birth; no matter who they were, he insisted on their dwelling in the leper hospitals, and attending upon the sufferers. Two things followed: (1) that something like improvement in the condition of the towns was begun, and something like a proper treatment of the disease. From this followed, in the course of time, the complete annihilation of the scourge in Europe, which wise action was really inaugurated by St. Francis, and (2) by this means, perhaps, more than by any other of his measures, he bridged over the chasm between the classes; he brought some of the highest and most cultured into

* Quoted by Brewer, Preface, p. xxii. *note*, from which it would appear that the treatment of the scourge was more severe in some places than in others.

† Cf. *Speculum Vitæ*, part i. p. 48.

closest sympathy with the suffering, and especially with the suffering poor.

Suffering was widespread in Europe at the time, especially in the growing towns, and one of his great achievements was that he inspired his brothers, through his own noble example and his own clear sight of what was needed, with a spirit of heroic brotherliness which made the outcast, the leper, the poverty-stricken beggar, the suffering and sickly working men of the time, with their ill-clad, ill-fed wives and families, the especial objects of interest and devotion to those who would otherwise never have troubled themselves about them. It was in this way, as well as in others that we shall have to notice, that by acting in the simple spirit of Christ, he showed such consummate statesmanship in breaking down some of the worst hindrances to goodness and happiness, which had been built up out of the feudal system. It is worth recalling a statement in his own last will and some statements made by the writers of "The Mirror of his Life," ere we pass from this question.

"When I was in the bondage of sin," St. Francis writes, "it was bitter to me and loathsome to me to look upon persons infected with leprosy; but that blessed Lord brought me among them, and I did mercy with them; and I departing from them, what before seemed bitter and loathsome was turned and changed to me into great sweetness and comfort both of body and soul."*

Then again in "The Mirror of his Life," occur the following passages :

"St. Francis on one occasion visiting the house of St. Mary de Portiuncula, found a simple friar named

* *Testamentum Sancti Francisci*. Early English Translation. In *Monumenta Franciscana*, 562, and quoted as above; Brewer's Preface, p. xxiv.

James, to whom he had intrusted the office of tending the lepers. Seeing the friar consorting with a leper on the road from the hospital to the church of St. Mary, St. Francis rebuked him, telling him that he ought not to conduct his Christian brethren, the lepers, in that manner as it was not becoming to him or to them. For though St. Francis was willing that his friars should serve the lepers, he did not like to have them taken out of the hospital when the plague was upon them, as men could not endure the sight of them. He had scarcely uttered the words when his conscience smote him, thinking that the leper had coloured at his remark ; therefore, wishing to make satisfaction to God and the leper, he confessed his guilt to Peter Cataneus, the minister-general, and begged him to confirm the penance he intended to impose upon himself. Then said St. Francis : 'This is my penance : to eat out of the same dish with this Christian brother.' When all were seated at table, a single dish was placed between St. Francis and the leper. He was a leper all over, disgusting for his open ulcers, especially as his fingers were covered with sores and blood ; insomuch that as he dipped his fingers in the dish and carried the morsels to his mouth, the gore and blood dript into the dish. As the friars looked on, they were greatly grieved and pained at the sight. But for the reverence they bore him, not one dared utter a word. He that saw these things bore record of them, and wrote them."*

Again, it is said in the same work :

" He appointed that the friars of his Order dispersed in various parts of the world should, for the love of Christ,

* *Speculum Vita*, part i. p. 56. Ed. Spaelberch quoted also by Brewer. Preface, p. 24.

diligently attend the lepers wherever they could be found. They followed this injunction with the greatest promptitude. Now there was in a certain place a leper so impatient, froward, and impious that every one thought he was possessed by an evil spirit. He abused all that served him with terrible oaths and imprecations, often proceeding to blows. What was still more fearful, he uttered the direst blasphemy against Christ and His most holy Mother, and the holy angels. The friars endured this ill-usage patiently, but they could not tolerate his blasphemies ; they felt they ought not, and therefore they resolved to abandon the leper to his fate, having first taken counsel with St. Francis. Brother Francis visited the leper, and upon entering the room, said to him, in the usual salutation, 'The Lord give thee peace, brother.' 'What peace,' exclaimed the leper, 'can I have, who am entirely diseased ?' 'Pains that torment the body,' replied St. Francis, 'turn to the salvation of the soul, if they are borne patiently.' 'And how can I endure patiently,' rejoined the leper, 'since my pains are without intermission night and day ? Besides, my sufferings are increased by the vexation I endure from the friars you have appointed to wait upon me. There is not one of them who serves me as he ought.' St. Francis perceived that the man was troubled by a malignant spirit, and went away and prayed to God for him. Then, returning he said : 'Since others do not satisfy you, let me try.' 'You may if you like, but what can you do more than others ?' 'I am ready to do whatever you please,' replied St. Francis. 'Then wash me,' replied the leper, 'because I cannot endure myself. The stink of my wounds is intolerable.' Then St. Francis ordered water to be warmed, with sweet herbs, and stripping the leper,

he began, and washed him with his own hands, whilst a friar standing by poured water upon him."*

It is easy to see what a vast revolution was likely to be wrought in the condition of the poor and the suffering by a body of men like the early Franciscans, inspired with the Christ-like spirit of their founder. But again, it ought to be remembered that this Christian simplicity and devotion showed the way to the best possible statesmanship, and that St. Francis was something more than a pious enthusiast—he was, I repeat, a social reformer and a statesman. However, we must return to his other works in the order of his life.

He was still haunted by the idea that he was called to restore the church of St. Damian. Disowned by his father, he had no means to effect this except through alms. It must have required immense moral determination to go into the public places of Assisi, to sing hymns to God so as to attract a crowd, and then to beg for alms, or even stones, for the restoration of the church. Some thought him mad, some were moved to tears, and some men moved to deeper thoughts of the truths which led him to such self-abandonment and such strength. Stones were given him, and we are told that he carried them himself to the ruined church to carry on the building. The priest of the church desired to supply him with food, but he preferred to beg his bread, and said that he found food given him, which would once have disgusted him, sweet and pleasant for the love of Christ. We read again at this time of the anger of his relatives; towards this Francis was always gentle, and sympathy spread among the townsfolk. Soon abundant help came, and gradually the church of St. Damian was

* *Speculum Vita*, part i. p. 79. Also in Brewer, preface, p. xxv.

restored. It was stone by stone built in the love of God. The sacrifices which Francis himself had made for it were great. He had given up earthly affection and worldly position, and for a long time a good name among men. It was a kind of image or representation of his great work for the Church at large.*

He had a further desire to restore two other churches. One of these was San Pietro, near Assisi; the other—which became so remarkable in connection with his name—Santa Maria degli Angeli, or as it has been usually called, St. Mary of the Portiuncula. The latter church had belonged to the Benedictines of Monte Subasio; it was not now used; it was small; it stood in the valley at the bottom of the ridge on which Assisi is situated. It became a home to St. Francis; he there constructed a cell, where for some time he practically lived, made his meditations, and spent hours in prayer.†

A touching story is told that on the feast of St. Matthias, February 24, 1209, according to his great desire, Mass was said in the little church, and that in the Gospel used at that time the following words occurred: "Take neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, nor shoes or staves." It is said that after the Mass, St. Francis decided to have from the priest an explanation of the Gospel. On being told that our Lord had given this direction to His apostles when He sent them forth on their early mission, he suddenly seemed to flash into joy, and declared that now he had found what he had long sought for—a clear direction as to duty.

* St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. ii. 23. Thomas of Celano. *Vita Prima*, cap. ii. 9. *Commentarius Praviss.*, viii. 165. *Acta Sanctorum*, Oct. tom. ii. p. 576. *Tres Socii*, cap. ii. 16.

† Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, cap. iii. 21. St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. ii. 23, 24, 25.

He threw away his purse, his staff, and his sandals, and put on the commonest dress of the poorest Apennine peasant he could find. It was the taking of what was afterwards so celebrated, "the Franciscan habit," the grey tunic and the rough cord.*

He seemed certain now of his call. His devotion to poverty for the love of Christ, and his nuptials with that poverty, which he called his bride, were thus fulfilled, and it was natural that the Order of Friars Minor should afterwards trace back their beginning from that day.

From that day also Francis developed a new power—the power of preaching. He spoke with great simplicity, but extraordinary fervour. He preached chiefly the blessings of repentance, the glory of trying to follow the perfect life, the love of Jesus Christ, and the sweetness of spiritual peace. In those wild days of violence and confusion he awakened men to the blessings of eternal peace coming from strength and goodness; in those stormy days of unfettered passion he aroused men to think of the delight of peace which comes from self-control and the love of God. He had broken away from the world, there was not a touch of self about him, and the unnumbered multitudes of the wicked and the wretched and the suffering and the heart-broken recognised in him at once a marvellous messenger from above. From that day he was no longer merely a man of suffering, but a man of power; of power all the greater because he never thought of it or dwelt upon it, but thought only of Christ and his fellow creatures. But the astonishing

* St. Bonaventura, *vita* cap. fil. 26; *Tres Socii*, cap. ii. 25; Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, cap. iii. 21, 22. As to this date, this is clearly established as Feb. 24, 1209. Cf. *Commentarius Provius*, *Acta Sanctorum*, Oct., tom. ii.-vii. 151-153.

and searching voice of one who had given up all things for the love of God and his neighbours, as it moved Assisi, so it was destined to move his century and all Christendom. His call was complete. He had responded to it with unswerving loyalty, and now his work had begun.*

* *Commentarius Prævius. Acta Sanctorum, ut. supra, x. 200. St. Bonaventura, Vita, cap. xii. 179, &c.*

CHAPTER V

THE BEGINNING OF THE ORDER AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE RULE*

IT has been said by M. Renan that "the great Umbrian movement of the thirteenth century is, among all the attempts that have been made at a religious foundation, the one that most resembles the movement in Galilee." This is true. Nothing can be more striking than the way in which St. Francis gradually gathered around him a number of disciples, first one and then another, just as our Lord Himself did. There is a story that the first who was attached to him was a child, and afterwards men imagined that Brother Morico (not to be confounded with a second Morico, who entered the Order at a later time) was this child, but for this there is no real evidence.

The first of the companions of St. Francis was Bernard of Quintavalle. He was a citizen of Assisi, apparently of considerable prominence in the place, and of substance, indeed of wealth. He was older by a few years than St. Francis. He had been deeply touched by his conversion,

* See for this chapter Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, cap. iv. 23, 24, 25. *Tres Socii*, cap. iii. 27, 28, 30, 31, 32. *Comment. Prev.*, vii. 156. Wadding, *Annales Minorum*, ii. St. Bonaventura, cap. iii. 28, 29, 30. "Chavin de Malan," chap. iii. 74 to 85. Léon le Monnier, *Histoire*, chap. iv. &c. &c.

had watched his course, and been greatly impressed by the calmness and perseverance of the saint under extreme trial and provocation. He had offered him hospitality on several occasions, which Francis accepted. It is related that on one of these occasions, when sleeping in the same room, Bernard had lain awake whilst feigning to be asleep. He saw Francis rise suddenly from his bed, and, throwing himself upon his knees, repeat again and again, whilst his hands and eyes were uplifted towards heaven and tears streaming down his cheeks, "Deus meus et omnia" ("My God and my all"). Seeing this, Bernard was deeply moved. "This," he said, "is a man raised up by God." He soon determined to offer himself to Francis. Shortly after he did so, and asked him what ought a servant to do who had received from his Master great riches, and who had come to the conclusion that he ought not to keep them. Francis answered that everything should be given back to the Master. Bernard rejoined that he was the man, and that if Francis approved of it he would give all that he possessed to the poor, for the love of God.

We have here an instance of the extraordinary faith and wisdom of St. Francis. He declined to give an immediate answer, but proposed that they should seek further counsel from God first. Early the following morning, they visited the church of St. Nicholas of Assisi ; they were accompanied by one Peter, who was himself a canon. He seems to have been a learned man and of a distinguished family ; he may have been a layman, he was certainly not a priest, and he had been admitted as a member of the chapter apparently because of his business-like capacities, as they desired to place their affairs in the hands of an able man. On reaching the church they attended Mass, and prayed

earnestly for guidance ; then they had the book of the Gospels opened three times, either by Francis himself or by the priest who had said Mass. The first time, the following words were read : " If thou wilt be perfect, go, sell what thou hast and give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." The second time, the words came : " Take nothing for your journey." The third time : " If any one will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." On hearing these words, St. Francis said to his two companions, " My brothers, here is our life, here is our rule, and that of all those who may wish to join us ; go then and do what you have just heard." They both went immediately and sold all that they had and gave to the poor, and then returned to Francis to become the first of his companions of the Order, and never left him ; this was on April 16, 1209. They adopted the same costume as that worn by Francis and constructed a poor hut near St. Mary of the Portiuncula, as a shelter for the three.

There is more known about Bernard than about some of the early companions. He seems to have been a man who by nature possessed that " moderation of thought and speech which is closely akin to truth," and when he gave himself up entirely to God, this calmness of disposition and gift of balanced judgment deepened more and more. He was remarkable for the absence of hasty judgment of others and had the habit of always seeing the best side of every one. He was a man excellent in business matters and most useful in arrangements for the extension of the Order. He was unsparing to himself, but full of consideration for others, and most eminent for his freedom from excitement and his extraordinary interior calm. Brother Gilles, or Egidius, said of him, " He is like

the swallows who feed while they are flying ; he is always about on the roads and on the mountains and in the valleys, and as he goes he is able to meditate and nourish himself with heavenly consolations. It is not every one to whom this grace is given." The consequence was, he was tenderly loved in the society and became a great help to all who knew him. Dante speaks of him,* and St. Bonaventura calls him the "Venerable Bernard." He was a great example, showing that the Franciscan movement was not merely a matter of enthusiasm and emotion, for he was a man eminently guided by the calmest reason.

The fact that two such men had joined Francis, who was looked upon as a madman and an outcast, greatly moved the whole of Assisi. The story reached the ears of a young man named Gilles, or Egidius, or Egiddio, as he is variously called. He thought of it, became in earnest about religious questions, rose up early in the morning on April 23, the festival of St. George, and went to Mass at the church of San Giorgio. At the Mass he determined to offer himself to St. Francis. He did not know exactly where St. Francis was, and we are told that he prayed, in choosing between three roads, to be guided where to go. When he reached the foot of the hill, St. Francis met him, emerging from a wood near the Portiuncula where he had retired for prayer. He received him with great affection, but with words that warned him to count the cost of what he was undertaking to do. The story goes on, that, taking Egidius to Assisi for the purpose of obtaining the rough Franciscan habit for him, the two were met on the road by a poor woman who asked an alms. Francis put his new disciple to the test : "Give, my brother," he said, "thy mantle to this

* *Par. xxxi. 102, 139.*

poor woman." Egidius obeyed without hesitation, and Francis found that he had won the right sort of disciple. He seems to have loved him with a very especial affection, and Egidius seems to have deserved the love. He had in him all the chivalrous spirit of the time, he was acquainted with all the most beautiful songs of the troubadours. Francis said of him : "He is our Knight of the Round Table." It has been truly said that he was really a knight-errant of the Order. He was a constant pilgrim ; he was clever with his hands and worked hard at manual labour, did basket work, cut faggots in the woods and sold them (or rather I should say, exchanged them, for he took no money) for the bare necessaries of life, carried water, worked at the vintage and in the harvests of the chestnut woods, and, through it all, was always praying or preaching. He spoke in a simple and penetrating way, we are told, touching men's consciences. He was fearless but gentle and very plain in speech, and never allowed vice to mask itself under false coverings. He spoke plainly to the Pope and even sharply to the cardinals. Every one who knew him was impressed by his extraordinary power of working cheerfully and brightly in this world, with his heart and mind in another. Next to St. Francis, he had perhaps more of the genuine Franciscan spirit of brightness and tenderness and strength than any of the brothers. St. Bonaventura says of him : "With my own eyes I have seen this holy brother ; his life was more that of an angel than a man ; he was continually absorbed in God."

There is a beautiful legend about him, which is certainly not true in the letter, but is true in the spirit, in the "Fioretti." It is related there that "St. Louis made a pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Francis after his canonisa-

tion, and while passing through Perugia he wished to see Egidius who was there at the time. An internal light revealed to the brother that his visitor was none other than the saintly king of France. He ran towards him, and as soon as they met, they both knelt down and embraced each other tenderly, remaining clasped in each other's arms for a while without speaking. At length, after continuing thus embraced for a considerable time, they separated and each went his way, the king on his pilgrimage, the monk to his cell. The fathers in the convent, having found out that it was the king who had been there, reproached Egidius. 'How,' said they, 'when so holy a king came from France for the express purpose of seeing you, could you be so rude as not to say one word to him?' 'Ah! my dear brothers,' answered Egidius, 'do not be astonished if neither he nor I were able to speak a single word, for as soon as we embraced, the light of the Divine Wisdom revealed his heart entirely to me, and mine to him; and so by merely looking into one another's hearts, we knew each other far better than if we had spoken, and with much deeper consolation than if we had tried to put into words what we felt, for human speech is powerless to express the secret mysteries of God.' As to this story, Mr. Ruskin says, "Of all which story not a word, of course, is credible by any rational person. Certainly not. The spirit, nevertheless, which created the story, is an entirely indisputable fact in the history of Italy and mankind. Whether St. Louis and Brother Gilles ever knelt together in the street of Perugia matters not a wit. That a king and a poor monk could be conceived to have thoughts of each other, which no words could speak, and that, indeed, the king's tenderness and humility made such

a tale credible to the people—this is what you have to meditate on here.”*

However, to go back, the society, if society it can as yet be properly called, now consisted of four men, and quite young men, who had formed no definite idea of rule, except that three of them were powerfully attracted by the extraordinary force of character and charm of the fourth. The leading idea which moved them, was to practise complete poverty for the love of Christ, and to serve God. The Franciscan family, like all really healthy societies, *grew*. It was not the result of a paper constitution, but came from the needs of men, as they were felt by the great founder, and from the grace of God. Now that St. Francis had got three like-minded and strong companions, he determined at once to set to work ; their object, as he told them, was not only to save their own souls—though it was to do that—but also and above all to lead men to repentance and to observance of the law of God, not only by preaching, but more especially by example. It was now that they started on what might be called their first apostolic journey. “Go,” said the sweet father to his sons, “announcing peace to men, preaching penitence for the remission of sins. Be patient in tribulations, watchful in prayers, in labours vigorous, in addressing others modest and humble, in manner and character grave, in receiving benefits grateful ; because in all these things an eternal kingdom is being prepared for you.” St. Bonaventura tells us this, and though these words were probably uttered before a later mission, they represent to us the kind of conversation that St. Francis would have had with them before their first apostolic effort.

Bernard and Peter went together, and Francis and

* Ruskin, *Mornings in Florence, Before the Soldan*, p. 89.

Egidius. Of the way taken by the former two we know nothing ; as to the latter, they seem to have gone without any definite plan, but their pilgrimage was certainly in the Marches of Ancona. They attracted people by their strange costume and their extraordinary brightness and happiness, and their entire fearlessness. When any number of people assembled, Francis addressed them, and then Egidius followed, urging his hearers to attend to him. It was a perfect astonishment to men and women at the time—so we are told—to find these two, apparently for no self-seeking motive, preaching in a simple straightforward manner love to God and repentance for sin, at a time when such things seemed almost forgotten, and the world appeared entirely given up to self-seeking and evil of every kind. Some, of course, believed them to be mad, but others saw that there was something deeper in their work than madness. They at any rate aroused those whom they met with and made them uneasy as to spiritual things. If the results were not immediate and definite, Francis saw that a beginning had been made and that something had been done. "Our religion," he said to Egidius, "will be like the fisherman who takes a great many fish in his net ; he lets the small ones go, but he keeps the larger ones."

After these first missions, they all returned to Assisi. They were now joined by four others, Morico, John of Capella, Sabbatini, and Philip, of whom very little is known, although one of the chroniclers of St. Francis speaks very highly of Philip, both as to his character and as to his preaching. The little company now consisted of only eight men. Their first effort was to beg from door to door in order to meet their actual necessities: they were treated with great rudeness, and the Bishop of Assisi himself, who seems to have been a fatherly and

kindly man, spoke with some disapproval. St. Francis' answer to the Bishop's remonstrance is on record: "If we possessed anything," he said, "we should require arms to defend our possessions, for the good things of this world are continual occasions of disputes and lawsuits, and they lead to violence and to war. They destroy all love to God and our neighbour, and that is why we will not have any possessions in this world."

Here there is no mere wild fanatical enthusiasm, but an example of the statesmanlike qualities in St. Francis, to which I have already drawn attention. The feudal system involved all, however inclined to peaceful pursuits themselves, in the quarrels of their superiors, for all the system of authority was connected with the possession of land. The serfs, or villeins, were gradually struggling towards liberty; in Italy this was more especially the case, because there there was more industry and more commerce. Feudalism in Italy was really less firmly established than elsewhere, but in many respects the feudal lords—having got their feudalism from Germany—were more oppressive in their claims. The serfs or villeins, as we should call them, were called *Minori* in Italy, and when St. Francis called his brothers "Friars Minor," he took his stand amongst the lower and suffering people. He saw the dangers of feudalism, and in his own simple and spiritual way, but still with statesmanlike capacity, he was determined to withstand them. I have pointed out how the ecclesiastical hierarchy had been drawn into this system of things, to the great detriment of religion, and Francis was quite resolved to make a complete change.*

* Cf. Robertson, *Hist. of Christian Church*, vol. iii. c. xiii.; Stubbs, *Essays on Mediæval History*.

It is after this that the chroniclers tell us that Francis had a special time of retirement and penance and prayer. He was like our Lord in this, as in so many ways, that in all the great crises of life he sought for solitude with God. He is said to have felt great down-heartedness and desolation of spirit ; this is not unnatural, for men who for Christ's sake try to take a line of their own and not to fall in merely with what is conventional, are sure to have such times of self-questioning and anxiety as to whether they have chosen the right course. The end was that he was filled with joy, and rose to a still higher sense of his mission and greater determination than ever. It is then that he is said when he returned to his brethren to have uttered his remarkable prophecy as to the extension of his Order, which has been preserved to us by his biographers : "Be comforted, my beloved ones," he said. "Rejoice in the Lord, let not the smallness of our numbers sadden you, and be not alarmed at my simpleness and yours. God has revealed to me that He will increase you, and that you shall spread to the ends of the earth. I desire to be silent as to what I have seen, but I am obliged by my love for you to make it known. I have seen a great multitude who come towards us to take the same habit and to lead the same life. I have seen all the ways filled with men walking in this direction in great haste. The French are coming, the Spaniards are hastening, the Germans and the English are hurrying on ; all nations are moved, and in my ears there is still the sound of those who come and go to perform the commands of holy obedience."

After this, they started upon what may be called their second apostolic journey. They went two and two in four different directions. In this journey they seem to have

covered more ground, aroused greater opposition, and produced larger results. They were greatly insulted in the towns, but their marvellous patience told upon people at last. As was usual with him, he and his brethren began their work by proclaiming peace and urging men to repentance.

On the return to Assisi, after this second journey, four more brothers joined the Order. The first three are not much heard of in history. The fourth was a knight, named Angelo Tancredi; he was of noble birth, and had great charm of manner. Francis met with him in the neighbourhood of Rieti. Of him Francis was exceedingly fond, and he became one of his most intimate and fast friends. There was another important addition to the Order not long after. The story of this vocation is interesting.* It was that of a priest of the city, named Silvester. At the time when Francis was engaged in restoring the church of St. Damian, Silvester had sold him some stones for the building at a low price, assuring him that he desired to join with him in so good a work. At the time when Bernard of Quintavalle was giving away his money to the poor in the streets of Assisi, this same Silvester apparently imagined that he had an opportunity of receiving more money from Francis. He spoke indignantly to Francis, and he—who detested covetousness as the meanest of all vices—plunged his hand into the apron which Bernard held, and gave a handful of money to Silvester. He plunged it in again, saying, with the nearest approach to scorn which he ever permitted himself: “Have you not had enough, priest?” Silvester turned away, but he could not forget it. He was no

* St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. iii. 30, &c. &c., and Wadding, *Annales Minorum*, vol. i. xxxviii. p. 49.

Judas ; his heart was not hardened ; he did penance for his sin, and asked Francis' forgiveness. Shortly afterwards he joined the brotherhood ; he was the first priest who had joined it, and, in consequence, was treated by St. Francis with great respect. He never looked back ; he became a distinguished member of the Order and gave great assistance to the founder on many occasions.

The number of the brothers was now exactly twelve. They had acted together and led a devout life, but now it was that Francis perceived that there was a necessity for regular rule. He drew up about this time—that is about 1209—the first rule of the Order, which, in its exact conditions as it stood then, we do not possess, but which we know to have been a kind of rough sketch of what afterwards took more exact shape.* It seems to have been a simple rule, for, like all clear-sighted and great men, he preferred that things should *grow*, and that his little community should be guided by *principles*, with considerable liberty of action, and not be embarrassed too much with details. He began to feel, however, that his undertaking was a grave one, and that he was sure to meet with considerable opposition.†

He had put before his brothers, in common with other religious Orders, what are called the “Three Religious Virtues”—Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience. They ought rather to be named Poverty, *Celibacy*, and Obedience, for chastity is a virtue required of *all* Christians, and it is an unfortunate mark of a certain tendency observable in the Roman Church that holy matrimony—which is one

* St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. iii. 34 : Thomas of Celano, *Vita*, cap. iv. 28, v. 33.

† *Tres Socii*, Appendix, cap. iii. 35.

of the most holy states in which man can live—has been considered as a “concession” to man’s weakness instead of an ordinance of God.* Incalculable evils have sprung from this perversion of truth, and there is something deplorable in finding Christian men making excuses—at the best—for that to which under God they owe their existence. Celibacy, when undertaken for God’s glory and in order to be more free (according to St. Paul’s view, for instance), is a noble response to vocation and a noble act of self-denial. Although in some respects it implies self-denial, yet in others it frees men from great self-sacrifices. A celibate as such, that is, an unmarried man who remains unmarried on principle, is by no means necessarily more self-sacrificing than a married man; very often quite the reverse, but when, for the sake of Christ, a man denies himself the joys of home, especially in a state of things like that in the opening centuries of the Christian era or during the noble effort of St. Francis in the thirteenth century, and leads a single life, it is a case of real and high self-renunciation such as our Lord contemplates and blesses. The treatment of the whole subject by the Roman part of the Catholic Church is deplorable. It was, and it is, a noble act of self-denying devotion in the great men who have been called in any part of the Catholic Church, whether Roman or Anglican, to live a single life for adequate cause. It is an unhappy perversion of the laws of God practically to *compel* an immense body of men to renounce the marriage state when they enter the priesthood. For Rome it has had

* Wadding, indeed, in *Annales Minorum*, xliv. p. 51, gives a long rule in twenty-three chapters. This is clearly one of his many inaccuracies. Fr. Suyaken, in *Commentar. Præv.*, *Acta. Sanct.*, tom. ii. October xi. 227, 8, 9, clearly proves this. Wadding has confused the earlier with the later and more complete rule.

its advantages. It has created, of the Christian clergy in the Latin communion, a *caste* practically outside the lives of their fellow citizens and utterly subservient to ecclesiastical drill. On the other hand, it has been the source of endless scandal, and men who might have been good men, if they had been allowed to follow God's leadings and not driven into an unreal condition, have, in numberless cases, lived with a bad conscience, constantly breaking a vow—a most unnecessary vow—which had been imposed upon them. The consequence has been that Rome has had to have such places as her South American Church, where priests whose lives at home have become scandalous, can minister—if ministration it be—amongst a population upon whom immorality sits lightly. But this by the way. What ought to be remembered is that when “Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience” were supposed to be marks of the “Religious Life” there was a great misconception, and it should have been called “Poverty, Celibacy, and Obedience,” for chastity, I repeat, is a virtue necessary for *every* Christian.

St. Francis, however, naturally took things as he found them. He accepted views of this kind, mistaken though they were, because they had grown up in the mediæval Church; just as he accepted special obedience to the Roman See as a part of Christianity, at a time when men had not realised that it was nothing of the kind, but rested upon misstatements of fact and falsifications of history. We cannot wonder that such things should have been accepted then and by him, when we see in our own time how the Roman Church clings to assumptions which are utterly baseless, and allows itself to make statements running in the very teeth of truth.

From among the “three virtues,” St. Francis was

especially enamoured of the first. He saw—as I have already pointed out—that the society of the time required a shock, that nothing but absolute poverty could meet the falling away of the Church and the world in the direction of luxury and selfishness. As regards “poverty,” therefore, he had no reserves whatever.* In after times his extreme determination in this matter caused, as we know, grave difficulties, but at the time there can be no doubt that he knew perfectly what was needed and produced the effect he desired. His rule, even though in a sketchy condition, was well before his mind, and, in view of the difficulties which he clearly foresaw, he determined to gain all the strength for it in his power. He desired, therefore, to have the direct approbation of the Holy See. This was not necessary.† Earlier Orders had not sought it or received it, but in the then state of Christendom in which the Pope, and especially a great Pope like Innocent III., played so important a part, it was of the highest moment that an Order so young, so peculiar, so unknown, should if possible, have his approbation. The idea of receiving such approbation seemed, indeed, chimerical. When St. Francis first broached the idea to his brethren, they were amazed and looked upon it as impossible.‡ There was about him, however, that clear common sense, that quiet simplicity of purpose, that entire trust in God, which enable men to see what is the best course, to be alive to the difficulties in their way, but to treat such difficulties always, not as things to be yielded to, but as things to be overcome.

* *Tres Socii*, Appendix, cap. iii. 44, 45. St. Bonaventura, cap. v. and by universal testimony.

† It was not made obligatory until 1215 in the IVth Lateran Council. Cf. *Histoire*, Léon le Monnier, c. v.

‡ St. Bonaventura, cap. iii. 34. *La Vie et Légende*, chap. iv.

It is said that St. Francis was consoled and strengthened by a dream, and that he succeeded, relating it to them, in reassuring his brothers. Humanly speaking, it seemed a hopeless task. How could they, young, unknown, despised, considered mere madmen by most people, succeed in even gaining admittance to the Holy Father, much more in convincing him? To those who trust in God, however, nothing is impossible, and St. Francis and his little band set out for Rome.

It so happened that the Bishop of Assisi was in Rome at the time.* He gave them all the help in his power and that help seems to have been of importance, for one of the members of the Sacred College was his own personal friend, viz., the Cardinal Bishop of Sabina. The Cardinal seems to have been a man of penetration, for he was deeply impressed by St. Francis and his companions. It is said that, fearing they might not be equal to the undertaking, he tried at first to persuade them to join one of the older Orders; this, however, they declined to do, and then the Cardinal recommended them to the Pope. In some extraordinary manner, Francis succeeded—being wearied with long negotiations—in penetrating with all his brethren into the presence-chamber of the Pontiff. Innocent III.—so the story goes—was meditating in the Belvidere gallery in the Lateran when the brethren presented themselves. Amazed at their intrusion, he at once ordered them to go. That night—so he says himself—he was disturbed by a dream, he saw a little palm tree spring up at his feet, which grew at last to splendid proportions. Without knowing why, he felt a deep conviction that the dream connected itself with the poor men whom he had so summarily dismissed. While thinking

* Wadding, *Annal. Min.*, tom. i. p. 61, vii.

over this the Cardinal called and told the Pope how he had found a remarkable man prepared to carry out the very counsels of the Gospel. The Pope desired to see the man in question, and when Francis and his companions had arrived, he saw at once that they were the men whom he had so summarily dismissed. St. Francis was allowed to explain to the Pope his views on the subject of the Order; the Pope listened to him with the greatest attention, and promised that the whole thing should be taken into the consideration of the Sacred College without delay.*

In the Sacred College there was considerable hesitation as to whether St. Francis' rule could be accepted. We already have seen how the feudal system had, in many ways, placed the Church in a false position. Gregory VII. had by his genius and determination fought the feudal system in favour of the Church. His victory, such as it was, was dearly bought, for the feudal power which the Church acquired soon weakened its spiritual force. Men saw with horror the pomp and worldliness of ecclesiastics. A great revulsion of feeling came in favour of poverty and simplicity. Hence, in part, arose many of the sects of whom mention has been already made. Hence arose the Catholic society of the Humiliants at Milan, but their influence did not spread to any extent beyond their own locality. The proposal of St. Francis was the first definite desire expressed within the Church for founding a society on the basis of poverty.† It was natural enough that the Cardinals should view it with some suspicion. They felt inclined, indeed, to condemn it as extravagant, but the Cardinal of St. Paul warned them

* Wadding, *Annal. Min.*, tom. i. p. 62, viii., &c.

† Cf. *Histoire de S. F. d'Assise*, Léon le Monnier, chap. v.

of the danger lest they should seem to fight against the Gospel rule.*

Shortly afterwards Francis had an interview with Innocent. He expounded to the Pope a dream he had had, which seemed to him meant to teach him that God would provide for himself and all his sons in their poverty. Dante has alluded to this scene between Francis and the Pope, and noticed the right royal manner in which Francis acted.† The Pope was entirely overcome by his arguments, and determined to approve the rule; he explained also that he himself had been moved to this determination by a dream which he had had, in which St. Francis was seen supporting the basilica of the Lateran, which appeared to be tottering to its fall. He blessed St. Francis and his brethren, and allowed them to depart.

They returned to Assisi by way of Spoleto. Before leaving Rome, however, they had all received the tonsure by the Pope's direction. This is one of the minor orders of the Roman Church, and by receiving it they received a kind of authority, and did not preach any longer as mere laymen. St. Francis himself probably received deacon's orders. The journey home to Assisi was marked by two things of some interest. It is said that while travelling on, full of fervour, they at times entirely forgot to take any food. On one occasion when it grew towards the evening and they all began to feel faint and hungry and found themselves in a deserted place with no human habitation near, a man appeared carrying bread, and when he had given it to them

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita*, cap. v. 33-36; *Tres Socii*, *Vita*, Appendix, cap. iv. 49-52; St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, 36-38.

† Dante, *Paradiso*, xi. 91, &c.

vanished out of their sight.* On reaching Orte they made a pause for about a fortnight, and considered the question of whether they should settle in solitude, like many other religious Orders, or go to the towns. The latter, which was really in accordance with all Francis' desires for helping others, was resolved upon, and, as we know, the Franciscans afterwards became powerful and remarkable as missionaries of the towns.†

On their return to Assisi they settled themselves not far below the little city and near the Portiuncula, at a spot named Rivo Torto, from a winding stream that passed by it. Here they took possession of a miserable, deserted sort of hut, scarcely large enough to house them at all, and without any sort of accommodation as an oratory. Their altar and book and breviary, all in one, is said to have been a wooden cross set up outside it. It was there that they carried on their devotions and made their meditations on the sufferings of the Saviour. Their poverty at the time was so literal that they were sometimes entirely without food, and supported life only on roots and herbs which were found growing around their little shelter.‡

There is nothing more striking about the character of St. Francis than his extraordinary brightness of temperament and his ardent love for nature. He enjoyed the beautiful Umbrian autumn, and his pleasure in the calmness and loveliness of the country around him deepened his love to God and added energy and fervour to his prayers. He was never tired of trying to instil into the

* St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. iv.

† St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. v. 40; Thomas of Celano, *Vita*, and cf. *Commentarius Praeius*, *Acta Sanct.*, tom ii., Oct. xii. 247-251.

‡ Wadding, *Ann. Min.*, anno 1210, xxiii.

minds of his brethren the same feelings, and inducing them to look upon the whole created universe as a glorious book upon which God's name was written. He was constant also in teaching them the love of poverty and the danger of riches, upon which the power of so much of his work was to turn, and he encouraged them to rise in every way above merely material things, telling them how great and glorious it was to "keep a great heart in a little house." By these conversations, many of which seem to have taken place at this time, he was gradually forming in them that beautiful spirit which for so long gave immense influence to the Order, and helped them apparently to pass quietly by the current affairs of the moment and yet to exercise such a sway over them.*

It was about this time that St. Francis first became a public preacher. His first sermon in any church was preached in response to the request of the priests of San Giorgio, by whom he had in fact, been educated. Soon after this he was placed in the pulpit of the cathedral by the Bishop of Assisi. The effect of his preaching was such that it was impossible to find room in the church for the multitudes that desired to hear him. He preached on repentance, on peace, on salvation, on the love of God. His words were like a new revelation to his hearers ; they aroused men's consciences and touched their hearts. He combined that keen, statesmanlike view of the needs of the time with intense faith and love and force, used with astonishing tact, so that men were touched with terror and sorrow, and, at the same time, won by the living force of the Spirit of God in his soul.

* Cf. *Histoire de S. F. d'Assise*. Léon le Monnier, c. v. ; also *Histoire &c.* Chavin de Malan, chap. iii. ; also *Fioretti*, c. vii.

It seems to have been after these sermons that the great effect of the movement began to be felt in earnest. In the year 1210 a charter of the commune of Assisi was drawn up and signed by the citizens. In this it is agreed that the *Majori* and the *Minori* shall live in unity and as a commune, and in the making of treaties or anything concerning the life or welfare of the place shall act together as good citizens, and not plot one against the other. Further, which is more important, the charter decrees the enfranchisement of the serfs, and, at the same time, arranges for certain reasonable payments for enfranchisement on a scale which came within the possibility of the poorest and yet did not disregard the vested right of the feudal lord. Further, in the same document there is an especial decree ordering that energetic efforts should be made to complete the basilica of St. Rufinus, which had been begun some seventy years before. It is a remarkable fact that at such a time a whole population should have been moved to act together towards justice and freedom between man and man, and bears witness to the immense effect of the life and preaching of St. Francis. At the time when the charter was drawn up the church of Santa Maria Maggiore was being rebuilt, and on one of the stones of the apse is the following inscription: "In the time of Bishop Guido and Brother Francis."^{*}

It was about this time also that a number of fresh disciples joined the Order, and that the brethren, through the gift of the Benedictines of Monte Subasio, came into

* Cristofani *Storia d'Assisi*, lib. ii. The Abbé Léon le Monnier in his *Histoire de St. Francois d'Assise*, considers that Cristofani has been shown to have been mistaken as to the date of the inscription, which is said to be 1216, not 1210. The result, however, is much the same.

possession of Santa Maria della Portiuncula. St. Francis had, as we have seen, laboured upon this church, but it had remained a piece of Benedictine property notwithstanding. It now became finally associated with his Order, and, in fact, the headquarters of it.* Of the new brothers who joined the Order, and of its early development, mention must be made in another chapter; but meantime we may remember how, through his extraordinary fearlessness, persistence, sweetness, and self-command, St. Francis' little community was already taking root and bringing forth fruit.

* Cf. *Comment. Prov.*, *Acta Sanct.*, tom. ii. Oct, xii. 257, 258, 259.

CHAPTER VI

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE EARLY FRANCISCANS

THERE are few things more remarkable than the rapidity with which the Order of St. Francis grew. Probably there has been nothing like it—as was the opinion of M. Renan—except the startling advance of the early Christian society under our Blessed Lord and His apostles.* Striking as it is, it is not so wonderful when we consider not only the condition of the Church and the people at the time, but also the character and mode of action of St. Francis himself. As to the state of the times it is impossible, probably, to exaggerate the darkness that had settled down upon the people owing, in great measure, to the feudal corruptions of the Church. There was, in fact, a great need, and St. Francis and his brothers supplied it.

We can only fully realise, however, this development and its true cause by dwelling upon the character and manner of action of the saint himself. His preaching, as we have seen, told at once upon his hearers ; his eloquence was the eloquence of a burning soul. He was full of sympathy and love and pity, for he saw that men were miserable, and he desired to help them. He seems to have acted with the greatest naturalness ; if, at any time, he had not

* *Vie de Jésus*, c. xl.

much to say then he did not say much, but moved men by the loving and fervid manner in which what he had to say was said. His sermons were unstudied ; they were the out-burstings of a heart that was always full of love to God and love to men. At times he seemed lifted above common things and quite transfigured ; and yet, although he could suit himself when necessary to the more cultured who might be listening to him, he spoke with the most perfect simplicity of diction so that the poorest could understand. It is never, indeed, mere eloquence in the thin sense of the word which moves or converts a soul. Natural gifts of speech are great gifts and may be beautiful and serviceable vehicles for carrying thought from mind to mind, but it is the living faith in one soul which moves another ; it is the fire, especially if kept under with strong control, which kindles the fire in another heart. St. Francis seems to have had very considerable gifts of natural eloquence ; he also had a high refinement of taste and character, he had a keen sense of beauty, he had a vivid imagination, he had a deep love for nature,* and, above all, he had that warm-hearted and sympathetic temperament which makes it impossible for a man not to feel for his fellow creatures. But beyond all this, there is no doubt that his heart was on fire with the love of God. Most men are pulled back or lowered in their work, even in the best work of a religious character, by some question of motives or some hesitations. It was not so with St. Francis ; what he did and what he gave to God and man he did and gave in a

* M. Fauriel, in the *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes*, tom. iv. pp. 189-207, has an interesting paper "De la Poésie Provençale-Italienne," which illustrates well the great influence of the Troubadours on the culture of Italy, when St. Francis was in his youthful years.

manner the most absolute, the most complete, that it is possible to imagine. The rapid development of the Order can be accounted for easily if we fully enter into this ; if not, it would seem incredible. I may quote here words which express with great exactness what is meant by such a "servant of God."

"When St. Paul, St. James, St. Peter," says a great teacher, "called themselves servants of God . . . they meant something more than what was true of all good Christians, of all religious men. They meant something very definite—a vocation and business different from that of men in general ; a very severe and exacting one. We know what is meant when we speak of a servant of the State, or a servant of the cause of learning, of science, of philanthropy. It means an employment of life and time and labour, as distinct as any of the crafts and trades and professions of men. It means that a man sees a great paramount object, and devotes himself to it. It is a devotion which fills up his life and kindles passion and enthusiasm, and gives shape and character to his labour, as well marked, as well bounded off from vague aims and competing interests, as the calling of the soldier, or the banker, or the artist. So to describe such work, in worthy hands, and in an adequate character, is to make use of no loose phrase. A great servant of the State, a great servant of knowledge—a man need desire no nobler title here. All recognise what responsibilities, what toil, what self-dedication it implies. And it is in such a definite sense as this that Apostles called themselves, and meant to be, the servants of God and Jesus Christ.

"It meant that, for that service, they had absolutely separated themselves from the common aims of human

life, the ordinary pursuits, the usual course and stream of activity all round them. They had to work apart from all this, and for this service alone they lived. It had a special call upon them, not shared with other men. Other men were, in their useful and innocent occupations, doing their duty, maintaining the state of the world, and thus serving their master. They were servants of God indeed; but they were not servants of God in that difficult and eminent sense in which St. Paul and his fellows were called upon to be. For them God had greater and more comprehensive tasks, which could only be fulfilled under very definite conditions. They were tasks, as much above the common tasks and trials of Christians as the tasks of the great servants of the State are above the responsibilities and employments of those whom the State embraces and protects. For the mass of good people, nothing from the very first can be clearer and more striking than the teaching of the Epistles; with all the mysterious greatness of their calling, their duty was to do each man his work in a religious spirit, in faithfulness and truth—"to study to be quiet and to do" their 'own business,' to carry into all the details of life, at home and abroad, the fear of God, the charity and lowliness of Christ. A holy and blessed life, indeed, if they could so live. But that imperfectly represents what his Master required of St. Paul. He was the servant of God in the sense that in him the whole man was demanded for and absorbed in his Master's business, as another man might be absorbed in ambition and in learning. For him, life had no other object. He had parted company with what men care for and work for here, as the enthusiast for distant travel parts company with his home. . . . This, then, is a definite character put before us in Scripture—

a servant of God—in the sense that there are men who have, or who aim at having, no other service ; who here on earth, consciously and of set purpose, devote life to one great engrossing employment, not for themselves, but for Him ; a service as hard and trying to flesh and blood, as it yet fills and satisfies the soul. Such service is distinguished, on the one hand, from the service which all good men render to God in their several callings in the world ; on the other, from the service done by men who are rather God's instruments than His servants. While the world lasts, its manifold work has to be carried on ; and it is God's work and service, when what we call its most secular occupations, and what are in themselves its natural and most earthly ties, are consecrated by His fear and the spirit of loyalty to Him. And, again, that service is done, too, with doubtful motives, with, perhaps, fatal mixtures of pride, or selfishness, or impurity, by men whose work is better than themselves—men of whom Scripture gives us the type in Solomon abusing his glorious gifts ; by iconoclasts like Jehu and reformers like Joash. But when we speak of St. Paul as God's servant, we mean something more than that he was the instrument of a great change, or that he followed his trade as a tent-maker in a religious spirit, or even that he fulfilled the lessons of ministerial faithfulness which he taught to the bishops and presbyters whom he left in Ephesus or Corinth.

“That distinct, definite character which Scripture presents to us when St. Paul calls himself the servant of God may be shown under the most opposite outward conditions. But under all different forms it has essential and common features : (1) It is exclusive in its objects and complete in its self-dedication ; (2) It contemplates as the centre of all

interest and hope, the highest object of human thought and human devotion, a presence beyond the facts of experience, the presence of the invisible God; (3) It accepts as the measure of its labour and endurance the Cross of Jesus Christ.”*

Nothing could more exactly express than this eloquent passage the attitude and character of St. Francis of Assisi. He fulfils to the letter the canons laid down, his whole being stretched forward with exclusiveness to one object, and he gave himself up with entire self-dedication. To him, the presence of God and God’s will in all things were the highest objects of contemplation and interest, far beyond any facts of mere earthly experience, and he had a passionate devotion to, and made unflagging efforts towards, the imitation of the Cross of Jesus Christ. This is the secret of his vast influence. It accounts for the wonderful effects produced by his preaching and the entire grasp which he had on the mind and character of those who were associated with him in his work.

We must not forget of course that there was a certain simple directness in those who listened to him. Advancing civilisation brings with it many gifts and blessings, but among these is *not* to be found a tendency to create or increase simplicity of character. Men grow used to all sensations, and all views, and all theories, and all doctrines; the customary and the commonplace take a strong hold upon them. The critical spirit asserts itself over the teachable mind, and even the best of men are apt to be more or less *blasé* in religion as in other things sometimes before youth has passed into manhood. It is this that Scripture alludes to when it says: “Blessed are ye poor,

* Dean Church, *Cathedral and University Sermons*, xviii. ; “Servants of God,” pp. 257-261.

rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom," and when it teaches us, "Except ye be converted and become as little children ye cannot enter in." A simple and loving faith is doubtless more difficult in an age of advanced speculation and critical questioning, and men are in danger of losing sight of the supernatural aspect of the Church as a great teaching body and thinking of it rather as a debating society. There are, of course, two sides to this; there are, of course, advantages as well as disadvantages, for God has special gifts and blessings for every age, but such, undoubtedly, was not the state of things in Umbria in the time of St. Francis. If there was much that was evil, and there certainly was, there was great simplicity of character. When faith was aroused it was a simple faith, and a faith which immediately operated in all the concerns of life.

We have seen how St. Francis' teaching moved the whole community of Assisi, and led them to a unanimous decision, which revolutionised their municipal arrangements and induced them to draw up a very liberal charter. In the same way the effects of his work showed themselves, and that with astonishing rapidity, to be real and deep elsewhere. Men came, one by one, desiring to join him. They were men of very various character, but all moved to follow his lead, and there is nothing more remarkable than the way in which they were leavened by his spirit and accepted his rule, however different they were either in character or social position. Directly after the removal of the brothers from Rivo Torto, a considerable number of fresh disciples joined the community. Of these, four are mentioned with special emphasis by the chroniclers, and they supply an example of what we have just been considering. (1) Juniper was a young man of an eager

temperament and childlike simplicity ; he was given to act on any immediate good impulse without sufficiently taking in the situation all round. The story is told that when in charge, at some festive season, of the sacred vessels of the church and some of the ornaments, he unhesitatingly gave some of these to a poor woman who asked for alms. The woman was in great need, he said, and some of the things in his charge seemed superfluities. He caused St. Francis some embarrassments, but he was evidently most lovable, and his faults were the faults of a very direct and loving soul. Santa Chiara called him the "plaything of Jesus Christ," he seems to have amused her so, especially as she was a woman of very great judgment. And St. Francis, who loved him dearly, used to say after some of his mistakes : "Well, never mind, I wish we had a whole forest of such Junipers.* (2) Then there was Masseo of Marignano. He was remarkable for his very great discretion, his courtesy and high-breeding, and pleasant manner. He frequently accompanied St. Francis in his missionary journeys, and was referred to by him as an example to others of manner and bearing.† (3) Rufino was also a noteworthy example. He was of a noble family, the family of the Ciffi, who at that time were the possessors of the fortress of Sasso Rosso, which commanded Assisi, and the ruins of which are still to be seen. He was related to Santa Chiara, and it was his joining the order which seems first to have turned her thoughts in that direction ; indeed, it made an immense impression on Assisi and the neighbourhood. On becoming a Franciscan he behaved with all the nobility and chivalry of his race. Accustomed as he had been to

* Wadding, *Annales Min.* Ann. 1210, xxv., and Chavin de Malan, *Vit. v.* chap. iii. p. 98.

† *Ibid.* xxxiii., xxxiv.

a more luxurious life than probably any of the brothers, he threw himself, with entire self-abandonment, into all the severities of the rule, and bore the austerities and privations which came upon him with even greater ease and brightness than any of his brethren. St. Francis spoke of him in the highest terms as one of the holiest souls of the times, and as "canonised in heaven."*

(4) The fourth specially mentioned is Leo of Viterbo. He was of a very strong and robust frame, which brought into greater prominence the extraordinary gentleness, refinement, and reserve of his character. St. Francis was in the habit of calling him playfully, "the little lamb of the good God." He was to St. Francis the best beloved of all. He has been called the St. John of the community, from the close affection between him and the great saint. He was his constant companion and even his confessor, and there are some beautiful and quaint things told of him, partly legendary, perhaps, but illustrating his character.

These four are examples which are especially mentioned, but a very large number were now joining the society.† As it developed, it is evident that there must have been more and more need of government. In the wonderful power of government St. Francis affords another parallel to St. Paul; indeed, it is curious, how often we have heard of men who could not close their eyes to the greatness of St. Paul and the completeness of his position as a servant of God, yet who could allow themselves to speak of St. Francis as though he were a mere pious, interesting, extravagant, perhaps somewhat fanatical enthusiast. We must never

* Wadding, *Annal. Min.*, anno 1210, xxxii.

† See Chavín de Malan, *Vie*, c. iii. p. 93; and *Fioretti di San Francesco*, cap. viii.; Wadding, *Annal. Min.*, xxxii. anno 1210.

forget that the evidence before us shows that a greater mistake could not well be made. He was a real statesman and a born ruler, and a ruler too of the highest kind, whose only power—a power which never failed him—of enforcing his commands, was the power of a magnetic influence, resting on high sanctity, warm sympathy, deep insight into character, and complete self-forgetfulness.

As the Order increased in numbers, and as the effects of it deepened and extended, all this was needed in an incalculable degree, for within two years of its first start, it had changed the tone of Assisi, and indeed of Umbria. Not only to effect this but to carry it on, not only to bring about a revolution but to prevent reaction and disappointment, required no common power. That power St. Francis showed in two ways, and to impress upon our minds adequately the real causes of the early Franciscan development, we must dwell further upon these.

The first difficulty that would confront him would be the difficulty of dealing with those who had become his immediate associates. It was no light task to guide and govern a considerable body of men, almost all young men, men for the most part, too, of some intelligence and culture and many of them of high rank ; it was no light task to govern them, in a life of the most extreme self-denial, and the most abject poverty, and to keep them happy and vigorous for the carrying out of what was nothing short of a religious and social revolution, and that, too, without, at the time, any of the ordinary appliances of the monastic life for training, and without, at the moment, and to begin with, a very definite rule.

That St. Francis succeeded in doing this is the best testimony to his extraordinary genius and his wonderful

goodness. He showed himself gifted, naturally and supernaturally, with certain powers which made all this possible. We may glance at some of them. One of the most telling, perhaps, was his unflagging hopefulness and brightness. Reproof is at times necessary, and that St. Francis knew, but on the whole, human beings are helped up to higher things more by encouragement than by reproof. Flowers expand in the sunshine ; they are nipped and shrivelled in the east wind. Severe as he was with himself, to his brethren and to all others St. Francis was constant sunshine. With all this, or rather as a cause of this, there was that immense moral strength which made men feel they could depend upon him, and he was so quick in perception, so acute in insight, and above all so real and intense in sympathy (like St. Paul) that he was a constant support on whom they could lean, when support was required. There are sure to be critical moments in the lives of all fresh beginners in spiritual matters, and there must have been some great crises in the lives of these young men. Fears, doubts, hesitations, were certain to come as trials and temptations to those who were making such immense ventures for Christ. Human nature after all is human nature alike in the thirteenth century as in the nineteenth century, and human nature must feel the strain of a great surrender. A religious of the first distinction in our own times has described vividly one of those movements of tremendous trial, when a soul, having put its hand to the plough, was tempted to look back. In beginning his novitiate he writes as follows :—

“ It was cold, the wind had turned to the north, and we had only a summer habit and a fireless room. We were no longer acquainted with any one ; all the prestige, all the excitement had faded away ; friendship followed

us from afar without any longer pressing close to us ; we were alone with God, in presence of a life the practical character of which was as yet unknown to us. In the evening we went to say office, then to the refectory, and finally to bed. The next day the cold was still more bitter, and we only half understood the order of our exercises. I had a moment of weakness, I turned my eyes towards all that I had given up, that life past, its secure advantages, friends tenderly loved, days so full of useful conversations, warm hearths, my sweet little rooms, the thousand joys of a life covered by God with so much exterior and interior happiness, to lose all that for ever was to pay dear for the pride of a strong action. I humbled myself before God and asked Him for the strength which I stood in need of. At the end of the first day I felt that He had heard me, and for three days now, consolations have been increasing in my soul with the sweetness and gentleness of a sea, which as it covers its sands, caresses them.*

This experience is a very natural human experience, and one that must have been felt by many, and in the case of the early Franciscans, it must have been felt very acutely, and by some we know that it was so felt. It was one of the great powers of St. Francis, that he was always a strong support at such times ; his truth of insight also enabled him to divine, before actual words were spoken, the difficulties which beset a soul. Of this instances are given by his chroniclers. And beyond all this there was that extraordinary gift of common sense and prudence which is one of the most striking marks of the saints. No man was more severely ascetic than he, but we know of cases where he would not permit exaggerated strictness

* *Lacordaire : La vie intime, par Chocarne, chap. x.*

about a rule, such as is so dear to a narrow and fanatical mind, when health came in question. About him, indeed, there was nothing narrow or fanatical.

On the other hand, his firmness about principle, first with himself and then with others, was a fruitful example for all. He would have no tampering with principle and gave no quarter to those treacheries of the will which are the gravest dangers to most men, when they are endeavouring to conquer self.

There is another mark of his keenness of intelligence and moral force. There have been those who have endeavoured to advance the "Religious Life" and whose ideas of mortification have been so clear and strong, that they have made everything as hard as possible. Such men may found a religious Order, but they can never carry it to any high measure of success. Human nature must have something to lean upon, and if it is to be subjected to great mortifications, there must be something to make up for these. For this reason, if for no other, it is necessary that in sisterhoods and brotherhoods, there should be beautiful chapels, the Reserved Sacrament, and services which lift the soul into another world. If the ordinary delights and supports of this world are entirely abandoned, there is all the more need for every help towards the delights of another. The early Franciscans not only deprived themselves of every the faintest approach to earthly comfort and enjoyment, but their very worship, as we have seen, was of the severest character. To his first brothers St. Francis supplied what was necessary, by putting before them, with all the poetry and brightness of his nature, an interior ideal of exquisite beauty. If the body was reduced to the minimum of comfort, the soul was fed on the

noblest thoughts of another world, and the vivid image of our Blessed Lord, realised by faith, in all the majesty of His simplicity, humility, love, and suffering.

Self-renunciation in him, too, was the most complete imaginable. If riches are power—as they are—still more so, in one sense, is poverty. St. Francis and his companions had given up all. They had nothing to lose. Men and the world around could not injure them, for there was nothing by which to take hold of them. They did not care for their lives so that they might finish their course with joy. It is not wonderful that such men, filled as they were with burning love of God and an intensity of “the enthusiasm of humanity,” should have exercised so vast a power and developed so rapidly into so vigorous a society. It is well known that the idea which most forcibly took hold of the mind of St. Francis and gave a tone to all his work was his intense belief in the dignity of poverty.* This was impressed upon him partly from his deep personal devotion to our Blessed Lord, and his sense of His poverty and humiliation; partly from his clear view that nothing could cure the wounds of the times but an effort towards an entire surrender of the world and what it valued most. He carried his ideas on this subject to the extremest limit. In after times great difficulties arose among his followers, between those who desired to carry out literally the early constitution of the community and those who considered this impracticable. In the first instance, however, if we are inclined to talk of his view as regards poverty as extravagant, we may remember (1) that he was following the exact pattern of our Lord’s earthly life, and (2) that just as in the beginnings of Christianity extreme measures were needed

* See St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. v. and vii.

which afterwards might be inappropriate or impracticable, so in the great Umbrian movement of the thirteenth century, there was an effort towards a serious revolution for which unusual things were required.

That St. Francis held to his thoughts as to poverty with unflinching tenacity there can be no doubt. Nothing would move him from this. He clothed the very thought in poetry and idealised it. The habits of chivalry of his youth here came in. Poverty became to him a fair, but neglected maiden, the daughter of a king who had not been treated with the honour due to her. She was his "love," his "delight," his "bride." He had such unbounded trust in God that he had no fear in his tremendous venture. He carried the principle into the arrangements of Franciscan dwellings, dress, and even churches. Nothing approaching to superfluity was to be allowed, and this severity was for long practised by his followers, and with marked success. We are told by an able writer how carefully this principle was carried out even by those Franciscans who were farthest from the cradle of the Order. "The English Minorite," he says, "adhered with unusual strictness to the Rule of St. Francis and contended for a literal interpretation of his commands."* And then he tells us in describing the original state of the Order in England, how completely this idea was developed. "Their first house, at their settlement in London, stood in the neighbourhood of Cornhill, where they built cells, stuffing the party-walls with dried grass. Near the shambles in Newgate, and close upon the City gate of that name, on a spot appropriately called Stinking Lane, rose the chief house of the order in England. In Oxford the parish of St. Ebb's, in Cambridge the decayed town

* *Monuments Franciscana.* Brewer's preface, note, p. xviii.

gaol, in Norwich the water side, running close to the walls of the town, are the special and chosen spots of the Franciscan missionary. In all instances, the poverty of their buildings corresponded with those of the surrounding district ; their living and lodging no better than the poorest among whom they settle. At Cambridge their chapel was erected by a single carpenter in one day ; at Shrewsbury where, owing to the liberality of the townsmen, the dormitory walls had been built of stone, the minister of the Order had them removed and replaced with mud. Decorations and ornaments of all kinds were zealously excluded. At Gloucester a friar was deprived of his hood for painting his pulpit, and the warden of the same place suffered similar punishment for tolerating pictures. Their meals corresponded with the poverty of their buildings. Mendicancy secured effectually the mean and meagre diet of the friars. It kept them on a par with the masses, among whom their founder intended them to labour. They could not sell their offerings ; they were not permitted to receive more than their actual necessities required ; meal, salt, figs, and apples ; wood for firing ; stale beer or milk. Whatever the weather, however rough the way, they threaded the muddy streets and unpaved roads, bare-footed and bare-headed, leaving the prints of their bleeding feet upon the ground, in gowns of the coarsest cloth, which an economical vestryman of this nineteenth century would be ashamed to offer to the most refractory pauper in a parish workhouse. St. Francis had provided carefully for the poverty of his Order. If the Gospel net, woven out of purple and fine linen, had hitherto rather scared than caught the fish it was intended to enclose, the founder of the Mendicant Order took care that it

should be as coarse and as homespun as poverty itself could make it."*

It may have been that the more severe and serious temper of the English people added a harsher strictness to this rule of poverty. It certainly is true that our more trying climate—grey skies, cold winds, absence of bright sunlight—gave a harshness which it had not in Italy, and deprived it of the poetry which gives a colour to even the meanest surroundings beyond the Alps. It is curious that an Order which was to be the very source and spring of so much that was beautiful in poetry and painting, and whose founder was a man so intensely sensitive to the slightest touch of beauty in sound or colour, should have had in its early days an appearance of the severity and harshness of Puritanism. It is certain, however, that this devotion to poverty was one of the strongest means of the development of the Order. To St. Francis, as I have said, poverty became poetical, and he clothed it in thoughts of beauty. Chivalrous and touching ideas regarding it passed from his mind into the minds of others, and, far from being squalid or forbidding in the Italy of those first days of Franciscan life, it acquired through his genius and his charm an aspect of loveliness, and became a spring of exquisite art.†

The mendicancy of the Franciscans seems in after times to have led to idleness, as the Order fell away from its early spirit of devotion. But such was not St. Francis' intention, and he took successful measures to prevent it at first. He insisted on the duty of work. He himself, like St. Paul as a tent-maker, worked at wood-carving.

* *Monumenta Franciscana*. Brewer's preface, pp. xviii., xix.

† Cf. Dante, *Paradiso*, xi. 76, &c. *Tres Socii*, c. ii.

He taught his brothers never to be idle, and to help to support themselves by the sale, or rather exchange, of anything at which they worked so as to procure some of the necessities of life. They were absolutely forbidden, however, to accept money on any pretence whatever, but were required to be paid in kind. The system, doubtless, would not work as years went on in its exact literalness, just as the extreme poverty of our Lord and His early followers and the community of goods practised for a time by the Apostles could not continue as the permanent condition of Christendom; but both were needed to give impetus at the first start of a great movement, and one of the strongest reasons for the early and rapid development of the Order was undoubtedly, as things stood, St. Francis' devotion to poverty.

Such seem to have been the causes of the development of the Order. Develop it certainly did. I may mention here that one great fact connected with it was the establishment of the Second Order.* Santa Chiara was born in 1194, and was therefore rather more than twelve years younger than St. Francis. The history of her conversion and her struggle for the religious life form an interesting chapter in the romances of ecclesiastical biography, but I must not dwell upon it now. It is enough for us to remember that through her means, under the guidance of St. Francis, the movement which had told so wonderfully upon the men of Umbria now touched the lives of the women. Her love for St. Francis, and his love for her, are full of the noblest romance. Had they been "in the world" they would probably have been what is commonly called lovers. As it was, their affection was as tender as that of the most high-minded lovers, whilst, at the same

* St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, chap. iv. 46.

time, it was the noblest and most purely spiritual that it is possible to imagine. She caught the Franciscan spirit completely—its brightness, its gentleness, its strength, and its practical character. Whilst St. Francis took measures to prevent any the most necessary communication between himself and the brethren of his Order and Santa Chiara and her nuns at San Damiano, he watched over the rise of the Second Order with paternal solicitude, and when other houses arose in connection with Santa Chiara's work he placed them under the care and protection of Cardinal Ugolino. But the spiritual tie between Francesco and Chiara was of the strongest kind. When St. Francis died she mourned for him with a woman's tears, but during the twenty-seven years of her life after he was gone, "slowly breaking," as it has been said, "the alabaster of her body on the feet of her Saviour," she carefully and courageously carried out in all things the rule and spirit of the saintly founder. This by the way.*

The development of the first Order proper—the spring and source of which I have pointed out—went on with astonishing rapidity. We are told that St. Francis had a time of hesitation on a very important point. Religious Orders before his time had been, for the most part, either contemplative or engaged in works of study. His mind was deeply exercised—so his chroniclers teach us—on the question as to whether he and his brethren should give themselves chiefly to preaching or to prayer. He laid before his brethren the question as it presented itself to his mind, balancing the various advantages of each course. The brethren were unable to answer him. He selected two of the brethren to go

* See *Vita Sancte Clara, Acta Sanctorum*; Wadding, *Annal. Min.*, tom. ii. anno 1251, vii. &c. &c.

on a message to Silvester the priest, of whom we have already heard, who had retired for a season of prayer, and to Santa Chiara. They both gave their opinion that the Franciscans should go out to preach.* St. Francis received this decision as an expression of the will of God: he started at once. This may be considered the first really great missionary journey of the brotherhood to Central Italy. We cannot follow it exactly, but we learn enough from the chroniclers to be able to form a fair idea of it, and there are certain incidents in it which are worth recording.

It was on this journey that it is said, that as St. Francis was approaching Bevagna, he was struck by the sight of a large number of birds, hopping about on the ground and in the branches of the trees. Full of joy as he always was with every created thing, it was then that he preached his sermon to the birds, which has been celebrated in Giotto's fresco. "Dear birds, my brothers," he said—so runs the pretty story—"you ought to love and praise your Creator, for He has given you your feathers as clothing and your wings with freedom to fly everywhere. He has given you nobility among all His creatures, and has appointed for you the pure stretch of air as your home. It is He who feeds you and He gives you the great trees wherein to build your nests, and He takes care of you, so that you have not to sow, or reap, or work at all. You are the delights of His tenderness and care."†

It is said that the birds attended, and stretched out their wings and came near to him, and he walked about

* St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. iv. 40, 41 (on the earlier hesitation); *ibid.* cap. xii. pp. 170-173.

† Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, c. vii. p. 58.

among them, and none of them seemed to fear him, and then he made the sign of the cross over them, and blessed them, and his brethren saw in this a mark of the grace of God in his soul, and truly it was so; for strangely enough as it seems to us, the creatures of God's hand recognise, as we often find, simplicity and purity of heart and goodness. I myself have seen a good man, with all the birds of his garden perched upon his head or his hands or his shoulders, or standing about his feet and refusing to be frightened or to leave him, and there can be little doubt that the extraordinary sympathy for all created things felt by this pure, strong soul, had a magnetic effect upon all creatures with whom he had to do. Nature is God's Eucharist. St. Francis, who was so near to God, had the same kind of feeling, "the Lord shall rejoice in His works."

At Bevagna he is said to have restored a blind girl to sight.* It is one of the many miracles recorded about him, with more or less good evidence. He then visited Alviano, and it is in connection with this visit that the pretty story is told about the swallows. As he preached to the people assembled in the piazza from a balcony, the swallows twittered so that his words could not be heard; "My sisters, you swallows," he is recorded to have said, "you have chattered enough, it is my turn to speak now; be good enough to keep silence and listen to what I have to say to the people." Immediately, so it is said, the swallows were silent and each one sat still in his place during the sermon.†

* St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. xii. 182; and (for a similar case, also mentioned by St. Bonaventura) Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, c. viii. p. 67.

† Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, cap. vii. 59.

As his mission advanced, he visited Ascoli, and there some thirty clergy and laity joined the brotherhood. He then preached—at least perhaps, at this time—with great effect at Arezzo; he had been there before, when it is related he had driven away the evil spirits who held sway over the city,* but on this occasion, assisted by Brother Silvester, he worked many conversions. It was thus that gradually, yet with quite astonishing rapidity, the Franciscan movement told upon Central Italy. Everywhere in an incredibly short space of time, the name of St. Francis was a household word among all ranks of men in Umbria and the adjacent provinces. He was followed by reverential crowds wherever he appeared, the bells of towns rang out merry peals at his approach. Men jostled one another in order to touch his garments, or to cut a little snip as a relic from his robe. If he preached in the churches, they were filled to overflowing. If he spoke in the public squares, crowds, leaving their common avocations, were round him. The whole country was moved, and not only were men awakened to higher things, and aroused to penitence, and brought to resolutions of a new and better life, but many of all ranks kept joining the Order and desiring to be allowed to abandon all things for Christ.

There are many accounts, at this time, of various miracles worked by St. Francis. By the chroniclers of his life they were undoubtedly looked upon as among the powerful reasons for the spread of the Order, but, whether they be authentic or not, the causes, as we have seen, lay deeper still.

There is one fact that has struck thoughtful writers on the subject which it is well to dwell upon, as it un-

* St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, c. vi. 83.

questionably contributed much to the success of the movement. St. Francis' policy was ever to recognise the appointed ministers of the Church. The Church, as we have seen, was in great need of a vitalising force. Corruptions had crept in, and it is not wonderful that men, losing patience, had allowed themselves to take up extreme attitudes. The various heretical sects, already alluded to, not only attacked what was wrong, but at last went on to wage war against the very framework and divine organisation of the Church. Not so St. Francis. With the wonderful common sense and prudence and humility of a true saint he recognised the rightful claims of the sacred ministry. A man might be an unworthy minister of Christ even though he were a bishop or a priest ; still, unworthy or not, he held a sacred office, and must so be recognised. St. Francis was strict in requiring the approval of the bishop for any work undertaken in his diocese. He was profoundly and sincerely respectful to priests, because of their office. This arose indeed from his deep sense of the importance of falling in with the mind of Christ, but also such a manner of proceeding greatly recommended his work. The regularly appointed clergy had no fear that their dioceses or parishes were being invaded by a "free lance ;" they had no hesitation in extending to the new missionaries the right hand of fellowship when they felt that all was being done "decently and in order," and thus, while St. Francis aroused the Church to a new life, he awakened no jealousies and no antagonisms within the Church.

So the movement grew, and the very report of the doings and teachings of St. Francis and his brethren startled men into a renewed life of piety and penance.

The development of the Order was marked at this time by two things. Of these the first was the foundation of new houses for the Order. The old dwelling at the Portiuncula was now far too small for the increasing numbers. It was necessary to expand. And probably in this, the memorable year 1212, the year of Santa Chiara's vocation, several such houses seem to have been founded. Of these the most remarkable were the Franciscan establishment at Bologna, founded by Bernard of Quintavalle, first of St. Francis' band, and that at Cortona, founded by St. Francis himself in connection with the call of Guido of Cortona, who joined the Order. There were other foundations, probably about this time, at Arezzo, Siena, Prato, San Gemignano, Pisa, Samminiato and elsewhere, and though we know little or nothing of the details of their beginnings, we know the fact, which in itself testifies to the rapid development of the Order. There was, in truth, a network of religious houses in the course of an incredibly small number of years, bearing the name and spirit and rule of St. Francis, all over middle Italy.

Another witness to the development of the Order was the decision of St. Francis to hold two yearly chapters at the Portiuncula. He had become sensible of the fact that as the Order grew so rapidly, the old familiar intercourse must be more difficult to maintain. To him, with his loving heart, this intercourse had been the greatest joy. But more than that, as a true leader and guide of men, he felt that if things were to go as they should, he must be in touch with the brethren. These thoughts prompted him to determine upon holding a chapter of the Order at Whitsuntide and Michaelmas. It seems probable that the first chapter was held A.D. 1212. It was not so remarkable

as some which followed it, indeed it seems to have been only remarkable as being the first.*

We may picture to our minds with unalloyed pleasure the assembling of the brethren in the sweet spring weather of Umbria. Every sight, every sound of his beloved native place had an unspeakable fascination for St. Francis. The joy of his advancing work was the joy of one who saw in it the blessing and an increase of the glory of God; his affectionate heart was moved at meeting again the sons and brethren in Christ who had been widely scattered at their work; but besides all this his practical and statesmanlike mind, his mind so aglow with poetry and affection, and yet so balanced and governed by prudence and common sense, saw an opportunity for building up what was failing, and strengthening the weak places, and giving fresh vigour to the work.

He formed three divisions—the fervid, the troubled, and the lukewarm. To the first he had to apply the curb of prudent counsel; to the second, patient thought and stimulating hope; to the third, rousing exhortation or even severe reproof. Like our Blessed Lord, he felt the necessity of approaching them soul by soul, and for the sake of his brethren and their work he spared himself no pains nor toil.†

Thus, in the short space of some three years, from such small beginnings had developed an immense society which was making itself felt far and wide in Italy, and was soon to be felt throughout the world.

And the spring and force of this astonishing movement, with such unprecedentedly rapid development was—under God—one man. It is a striking witness indeed to

* Cf. Wadding, *Annal. Min.*, and Léon le Monnier, *Histoire de S. François d'Assis*, chap. viii.

† *Ibid.*

the force of genius, but still more to the extraordinary power of single-hearted goodness. It is a moving example of the stimulating effect of "the mind of Christ."

"Take," says a great teacher whose words I have already quoted—"take a man who commands the interest of all who look into his history, so heroic was he, so simple, so pure and deep in his charity for men—St. Francis of Assisi—who, when all around him was sunk in worldliness and selfishness, rose up and with princely heart, as the great poet says, claimed as his spouse the Poverty of Jesus Christ ; whose love, kindled by the love of the Crucified, overflowed over the souls of men, to all that the Crucified had made, beasts of the fields, and birds of the air—in his 'Song of the Creatures,' with his unresting fancy fired by that love, claiming kinship and brotherhood with all things created—the sun, the moon, the wind, the fire, even with 'Sister Death' ; who, giving up all for Christ, set himself, as the business of his life, to share and understand the lot of the poor, the weak, the wretched ; to dignify their condition, to comfort them with his boundless sympathy there was the reality of a life devoted to Christ. . . . Would not St. Paul have hailed such a one as 'like-minded ?' Here, halfway down the centuries is realised in a man 'the mind of Christ.'*

It was this after all, which—again we may remind ourselves—was the real spring of this unparalleled and rapid movement—the unique character, the prudence, self-sacrifice, courage, love and sanctity of St. Francis.

* Dean Church : *The Discipline of the Christian Character*, pp. 127, 128.

CHAPTER VII

THE EARLY MISSIONARY EFFORTS OF THE FRANCISCANS

ONCE satisfied that the call of his brotherhood was not to contemplation but to preaching, it was impossible that St. Francis should be satisfied with missionary efforts in Italy alone. The Christian Church is a missionary society or it is nothing. Its very *raison d'être* is to carry on the battle between light and darkness, between good and evil. We sometimes hear the avoidance of proselytism spoken of as a Christian virtue ; if that means the absence of a fussy, controversial spirit the statement is true, but if it means the dignified indifference to the claims of truth and the condition of souls it is the reverse of true. Our Lord brought into the world a divine enthusiasm. He was Himself consumed by an ardent desire for spreading His Father's kingdom and saving human souls from ruin. Wherever men have been His sincere followers that fire has in some measure burnt in their breasts. It was inevitable, therefore, that so close a follower of Jesus Christ as St. Francis of Assisi undoubtedly was should be consumed with the fire of an ardent longing to bring home to others the blessings of Christianity which he felt so deeply himself.

He felt what ought to be felt by all true Christians —the absolute certainty and the enormous importance

of revealed truth. There are certain good and certain bad tendencies in modern thought which make it more difficult, perhaps, to realise this so fully now. Our natural tendency, too, is subjectiveness of mind. We often fail by failing to realise the greatness of truth in itself, apart from its effect on us. St. Francis and the men of his time had no such difficulty ; they felt the dignity of truth as an objective fact. If a thing were true, if God had revealed anything to His Church, no matter what its effects might or might not be on themselves, the thing itself was of the gravest importance. Besides this, St. Francis had in the highest measure a deep sense of the need of human nature. Probably no man, unless, indeed, St. Paul, had such intense human sympathy, and in some respects the sympathy of St. Francis seems to have been more wide-reaching than even that of St. Paul, for it went forth to all created things and was not limited to the human race alone. St. Francis also felt, in the deep way a saint alone can feel, in a way in which modern tendencies often prevent us from fully feeling now, the really awful character of sin, of the wilful opposition of the will of the creature to the will of the Creator, and the mystery and depth and intensity of the love of God in Jesus Christ. Above all, St. Francis felt, in that supreme degree possible to so lofty a nature and such high spiritual powers, a thorough belief in humanity. No one can succeed in raising men to higher things who does not believe in men. Calvinism—perhaps the most hideous of heresies—may have laid hold upon groups or coteries, but it never could convert a world, for the Calvinistic spirit has looked upon humanity as a mass of corruption and upon God as a capricious and even a cruel judge ; while the Catholic spirit has looked upon

God as a Father and upon humanity as a ruin indeed, but a splendid ruin. St. Francis, with his intense sympathy, loved and believed in his fellow creatures. These views, these endowments, carried in so gifted a nature and so saintly a soul to the highest power, made him of necessity a real missionary.

It would appear that he had long been thinking of extending his missions beyond the confines of Italy. It is uncertain whether he believed it to be necessary to have the sanction of the Pope for missions abroad; it is, however, quite possible. Certainly he was in Rome in 1213, and certainly, also, Innocent III. himself had had his thoughts turned to missionary efforts amongst the Mohammedans, to judge from his letter to the Sultan of Aleppo. Anyhow, St. Francis returned to Assisi full of the idea of foreign missions, and determined upon making a first effort. He appointed Pietro Catani to take charge of the Order during his absence, and set sail with one of the brethren for the Levant. The weather was tempestuous, and the vessel had to seek shelter on the Illyrian coast. During the delay he, as usual, preached to all who would listen, but determined to return to Ancona as he could not carry out his immediate object. Being without money, he and his attendant brother were refused by the captain of the ship. They succeeded, however, in obtaining a passage as "stowaways," and food was supplied to them for the journey by some generous disciple. It is said that when provisions fell short in the ship St. Francis made himself known, and shared what he had with the rest. Not only so, but it was believed that God miraculously increased the provisions, which he distributed to the crew, so that they lasted to the end of the voyage. The passengers and crew certainly believed

this, and were deeply touched by the presence among them of a saint. There was some preaching at Ancona, and preaching which his biographers tell us was attended with great success. After this, he was very probably for a short time at the Portiuncula before he made another missionary effort.*

Without such another effort, however, he was not satisfied, and he decided this time to try Spain. That country was so largely under the power of the Saracens that there was plenty of opportunity for missionary work there. Pietro Catani was again appointed in command of the Order, and Francis set forth with his first disciple, Bernard of Quintavalle, and sailed from Pisa to Spain. The voyage was uneventful, and the brothers landed at Barcelona.† There is a story told that between Barcelona and Gerona Bernard got into trouble by helping himself to some fruit in a vineyard. From this St. Francis extricated him, and in doing so made a fast friend of the master of the vineyard. We do not know much that is definite as to his preaching in Spain, but we do know that it was generally very successful. Indeed, this is proved by the fact that he founded several monasteries in Burgos, Logroño, Avila, and Vitoria. What time he exactly spent in Spain we do not know. His intention was to have gone to Morocco, but again his mission effort was hindered, although this time by a different cause. Constant fatigue, constant work, and the incessant activity of his burning spirit began to tell upon a frail and sensitive frame. He fell ill of a violent fever. It was evident that a journey into Africa was impossible, and he

* Chavin de Malan, *Histoire*, chap. v. p. 125: St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, chap. iv.; Suysken, *Comment. Præv.*, *Acta Sanctorum*, Oct., xiii. 292-296.

† Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, cap. vii. pp. 55, 56.

determined to return to Italy. There is some little doubt both as to his route and as to the exact time of his return. He certainly visited the shrine of St. Iago de Compostella on his way, and it seems most probable that he returned by the route of the Pyrenees. He passed through Perpignan, and visited Montpellier, and stayed at Lunel. The Baron de Lunel was completely won over by him, and his preaching at this place and to his noble guests bore fruit afterwards, for the celebrated Franciscan Gerard, afterwards called "Blessed," who is especially reverenced in the diocese of Montpellier to this day, was the grandson of the Baron.*

St. Francis continued his route through Provence, Piedmont and Lombardy. He stayed at Avignon and went by the valley of the Durance to Gap. It is said that in crossing the river when swollen by excessive rains, he and his companion were only saved from disaster by the kind intervention of a friendly peasant, and at Gap the inn called the "Bon Estaou" (*i.e.*, the good inn) is still shown as the place where he stayed. Although he had been entirely baulked in the object of mission effort with which he had set out, his journey throughout was a missionary journey. He never failed in seizing every opportunity of preaching, and the extension of the Franciscan brotherhood in Spain dates from this time.†

Whether he returned to Assisi immediately is not quite certain. Probably he did not, for certainly and almost immediately he was moving about in the north of Italy.

* Suysken, *Comment. Prav.*, *Acta Sanctorum*, Mens Oct., xiv. 297-306; and Mariana, *De Rebus Hispaniolis*, Liber ii. and xii. 8; Wadding, *Annal. Min.*, anno 1213, lx. and anno 1214 *passim*.

† There is, however, a doubt here as to dates. Suysken (*Comment. Prav.*, xiv. 305) thinks his return to Italy at this time was by sea.

We know of his being at Susa, Turin, Moncaglieri, Asti, Cortemiglia, and Alessandria della Paglia. There are various stories of his work in these places on which it is not necessary to dwell. One, however, is important as it brings out a characteristic feature in his work.

During his stay in Lombardy at this time he is said to have been welcomed in a village which he visited, by the whole population, headed by their parish priest. This priest seems to have been a man of not irreproachable character, and there were Cathari in the crowd who, so to speak, tossed the fact in the face of St. Francis, and asked could it be expected that they should reverence and attend to such a man. St. Francis went at once and knelt before the priest and kissed his hands. "I know not," said he, "if these hands are stained, but one thing I do know, were they as much stained as you say they are, their want of worthiness could not affect the virtue and the efficacy of the divine sacraments. Therefore innumerable benefits have flowed through them upon you Christians, and for this reason I will kiss them, honouring God by honouring him whom God has made His minister."* Here was a gentle reproof to the priest, if the priest were sinful, more likely to carry conviction to his conscience than severer words; and here was a severe reproof, conveyed by gentle words, to the sanctimonious pharisaism of those who were assuming to themselves the office of the great judge. Here also, was an instruction in few words and in a simple act to all present as to the divine character of the sacred and appointed ministry; but here, it is especially to be noted, is an example of that wise policy of St. Francis—if that can be called policy which is the natural outcome of a

* Léon le Monnier, *Histoire Générale*, chap. ix.

mind direct and clear—which contributed as much to the success of his work, viz., his unflagging moderation and balance of mind which led him to recognise established order as of God's appointment; never to allow his zeal to outrun his discretion; always to exercise those statesmanlike qualities which lead not to revolution but to reform.

From thence, St. Francis went eastward and visited San Severino, where the first house of the poor class had just been founded as a daughter house to the convent of St. Damiano. It was whilst preaching here that he was the means of converting a troubadour of some distinction, much renowned at the time for his chivalrous verses. He took the name of Brother Pacifico, who afterwards became remarkable as the envoy of St. Francis sent to establish the order in Paris. Early in the year 1215, he was again at the Portiuncula, and in the spring of that year he suffered again from an attack of fever, similar to that which had prostrated him in Spain. Unable as he now was to preach, he addressed a letter to all Christians which ran as follows:*

“TO ALL CHRISTIANS, CLERICS, RELIGIOUS, LAICS, MEN
AND WOMEN, WHO ARE IN ALL THE EARTH.†

“O how happy and blessed are those who love God, and who fulfil well what Jesus Christ orders and the Gospel; thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and thy neighbour as thyself!

“Let us love God and adore Him with great purity

* Wadding, *Annal. Min.* anno 1212, xxxviii., &c.

† *Ibid.*, anno 1213, iv. &c. Wadding places these matters at an earlier date. This seems to me improbable.

of mind and of heart ; for that is what He demands above all things. He has said that the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, and that it is in spirit and in truth that those who worship Him should worship. I give you salutation in our Lord."

Shortly after this he dictated a much longer letter which was a kind of theological instruction. In this he dilates upon the mystery of the Incarnation, the Holy Eucharist, the sacrificial aspect of the death of Christ, His power as an example. He enlarges upon the motives of fear, of hope and of love which should move men to observe God's commandments. He exhorts to a diligent attendance at church and proper respect for the clergy. He dwells upon the duty of prayer, fasting, almsgiving, confession, works of penance and communion. He dilates upon the love for one's neighbours, the proper administration of justice, on good government, and on submission to lawful authority ; and finally after dwelling upon the miseries of the body which is but dust, and the happiness of the soul which is so wonderfully related to the three persons of the Holy Trinity, he ends in this way :—

" The body is sick, death approaches, friends come and say, ' Set your affairs in order for you are in danger, there are his wife, his children, his friends making believe to weep. He looks at them and weeps also. He says, ' My soul, my body, my fortune, I put entirely into your hands.' But unhappy and accursed one, according to the word of the prophet, who puts his safety and his confidence in such hands. The family brings a priest ; he says to the sick man : ' Do you wish to have true penitence

for all your sins?' 'I do much wish it!' 'Are you willing to make restitution of whatever you have taken unjustly from others, and to give of your possessions in order to satisfy the justice of God?' 'No,' says the sick man. 'Why not?' replies the priest. 'I leave my relatives possessors of all my property.' Then he begins to lose the power of speech and dies in this deplorable state. So, every one ought to know that in whatever place and in whatever manner a man dies in a state of mortal sin, and without having satisfied the justice of God, so far as he could, he is stripped of everything, and the devil carries away his soul with such pains as can only be known by him who suffers them; it is tormented in hell, whilst the worms gnaw his body, and his friends and his relations divide his goods among themselves and say: 'Cursed be this man, who ought to have acquired more, and to have left us much more.' Thus the love of the passing world has ruined his body and his soul. I, brother Francis, your most insignificant servant, ready as I am to kiss your feet, I pray you and implore you, by that love which is God Himself, to receive and to put in practice (humbly and with love) those words of our Lord Jesus Christ and all other which went forth from His mouth. May all those into whose hands they shall fall, and who shall understand their sense, send them on to others that they may profit by them. If they persevere unto the end in the good use which they ought to make of them, may they be blessed by the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen."*

At the chapter at Whitsuntide this year Francis accord-

* Wadding, *Annal. Min.*, tom. I., anno 1213, v. vi.

ing to his great desire presided. After the effort that he made there and in consequence of his illness he suffered from extreme exhaustion, and when the chapter was over and the brethren had dispersed, he is said to have retired for rest to Monte La Vernia. It is said that this rugged hill, the crown of which commanded a beautiful and extensive view, had been given to him informally by the Count Orlando of Chiusi in the Casentino, who had been greatly struck by one of his discourses, and was formally made over to the Franciscans by the sons of Orlando on July 9, 1274. The brethren had established themselves there however, in cells, as early as May 9, 1213, and Count Orlando was received by St. Francis himself as a tertiary of the Order. In a cell constructed for him on the top of this rugged hill he found great rest, and enjoyed the magnificent view with that sense of beauty which he possessed so strongly.

Soon after this, his rest was interrupted by the necessity of going to Rome to be in attendance in case he were summoned to give information on the monastic question which it was thought would come before the great Council of the Lateran which had been called by Innocent III. As a matter of fact the question probably, did not come before the Council. His stay in Rome, however, was rendered remarkable by the meeting between himself and St. Dominic.* The latter was the founder of the other great Order of the time, the Friar-Preachers. The two Orders of St. Francis and St. Dominic were destined to exercise the widest influence on the Church of the Middle Ages, but the two great men

* Suysken, *Comment. Prav.*, *Acta Sanctorum*, Oct, tom ii. xiv. 307 to end. There is apparently some contrariety of testimony both as to facts and dates. Of the meeting of the two saints there can be no doubt.

had never met. It is said that when in Rome this time St. Dominic had a dream, and in it he saw the mother of our Lord present two men to her divine Son. In one he recognised himself; the other he did not know but he looked at him attentively and his appearance was impressed upon his mind. The following day St. Dominic saw, among a number of poor men in a church, the man of his dream and going to him he embraced him, exclaiming, "You are my companion, you will walk with me; let us keep together, and there is no one who will have power to prevail against us." This poor man was, of course, St. Francis. A warm friendship sprang up between them. Unhappily that friendship did not last between the two Orders, but on the contrary they were noted in after years for bitter rivalries. Even Lacordaire has allowed himself to say, "the kiss of Dominic and Francis has been transmitted from generation to generation on the lips of their posterity." This is unfortunately the reverse of the truth, though probably such words from Lacordaire are an outcome of his enthusiastic charity which allowed him to see all things *couleur de rose*. Other writers have unfortunately repeated it with perhaps less excuse. There is nothing to be gained by falsifying history, and the too prevalent Roman habit, in making statements of thinking more of edification than of truth, can never in the long run do anything but harm.

St. Francis was again at Assisi for the general chapter of 1216. It was at this chapter that more definite and formal resolutions seem to have been come to as to the mission work of the Order, and that different fields of missionary effort were allotted to different brethren. For the sake of having a clear view before us of those early mission efforts it is better to pass on for the moment to

the details of them, and return by and by to other matters of interest at the time. Suffice it to say, in passing, that it was in the May of this year, 1216, that the Pope reached Perugia on his way to endeavour to reconcile Genoa and Pisa, and to induce them to take part in the Crusade which had been decreed by the Council of the Lateran, and that it was in the July of the same year that he died there. It was also in this spring that the Cardinal Ugolino visited the Portiuncula, was delighted with all that he saw of the lives of the brethren, and offered to St. Francis to become the protector of the Order, and so to fill the place of Cardinal di San Paolo who had recently died. This event was a most important one in the early history of the Order, as Cardinal Ugolino proved himself a fast and useful friend.

But to return, it was probably at a later chapter, that St. Francis made known his decision—while arranging for the various fields of labour of the Order—that he himself, accompanied by Brother Illuminato, was to visit Egypt and preach to the Sultan.* It appears to have been in the year 1219 that they landed in that country.† The crusading army, under the command of Jean de Brienne, was lying at the time before Dainietta. The missionaries produced a striking effect on the mind of the crusading forces. This is the testimony which comes to us on the subject: “We saw Brother Francis,” writes the then Bishop of Acre, “arrive, who is the founder of the Minorite Order; he was a simple man without letters, but very lovable, and dear to God as well

* *Tres Socii*, Appendix, 62; *Wadding, Annal. Min.*, anno 1219; *Suysken, ut supra* xv. 331-334.

† *Thomas of Celano, Vita*, 57; *St. Bonaventura, Vita*, 133; *Suysken, ut supra*, xvi. 344, 345, 346.

as to men. He came to us when the army of the Crusaders was under Damietta, and was much respected by all."* It is uncertain whether St. Francis approved or not of the Crusades. Probably with his keen intelligence, he did not ; but it was not his way directly to interfere in what may be called political or social movements. His power lay in the unswerving directness and promptitude with which he worked in the kingdom of God, and applied supernatural principles to life as he found it, leaving the principles to do their work. Fussiness, or what we should call "faddiness," was quite alien to his breadth of spirit. In correcting what was wrong, and working out what was right, he went to the root of things ; he never allowed himself merely to play with surface matter, or "irritate interests," as we should say, but applied principles and forces and allowed them to work. That the Crusades were a great mistake from a Christian point of view we now know. At the time, however, they more or less possessed the mind of Europe, and Innocent III. clung to the movement, perhaps even more as a statesman than as a Christian, from the strong sense that, for the safety of Europe, the Mussulman wave had to be thrown back. Be that as it may, St. Francis, venturing on no general criticism of the Crusades, felt that the Christian way to attempt the overthrow of Islam was missionary effort. It is said that he warned the Crusaders against an attack upon the Saracens, which was planned soon after his arrival with the army. His warning was disregarded. The attack took place on August 29. The heat was excessive. The Christian armies were totally defeated with great slaughter. Men believed that this was in the

* Jacques de Vitry, and *Historia Occidentalis*, quoted by Suysken, *Comment. Prav.* xvi. 357.

saint an instance of the spirit of prophecy. It is not necessary to attribute it to anything especially supernatural. It is more true, and more interesting, to see in it that common sense and wisdom "which cometh from above," which was so constantly shown in this remarkable man. "The eye of the just," says one of his biographers, "often discovers the truth better than seven sentinels posted on the top of the hills."*

At length, with the reluctant consent of Cardinal Pelagius, the papal legate, St. Francis and his companion passed to the camp of the infidel. The act was considered rash to the verge of madness, but Francis himself had no hesitation and no fear. As was to be expected, they were at first seized by the enemy and thrown into chains. They succeeded, however, in persuading their captors to take them into the presence of the Soldan. Malek-Camel—"The Perfect Prince"—appears to have been a man of a noble nature, and he acted towards the missionaries with great magnanimity. Francis seems to have had two interviews with the Soldan. One hardly knows which most to admire, the courage, sincerity, and outspokenness of the missionaries, carrying their lives in their hands, or the generosity and large-mindedness of the infidel prince. St. Francis is said to have challenged the Soldan's religious priests to trial by fire. This was rejected, but the Soldan not only dismissed the missionaries in safety, but desired to load them with presents as a mark of his favour. Behind all religious difference there lie important facts of human nature. Brave and sincere men, however separated in religious conviction, understand one another and admire. "The spirit of God is in the whole earth,"

* St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. xi. 154, &c.; Suysken, *ut supra*, 348, 349.

and there is a "light that lighteneth every man that cometh into the world."*

The interview with the Soldan forms the subject of one of Giotto's frescoes in the chapel in Santa Croce. It is thus that Mr. Ruskin comments upon it in his characteristic manner, and though his is chiefly a criticism or instruction on Giotto it brings out very truly some important points in this incident in St. Francis' life.

"The subject is St. Francis challenging the Soldan's Magi—fire-worshippers—to pass with him through the fire, which is blazing red at his feet. It is so hot that the two Magi on the other side of the throne shield their faces. But it is represented simply as a red mass of writhing flame, and casts no firelight whatever. There is no ruby colour on anybody's nose; there are no black shadows under anybody's chin; there are no Rembrantesque gradations of gloom, or glitterings of sword hilt and armour. . . . The life of St. Francis was always full of joy and triumph; his death in great suffering, weariness, and extreme humility. The tradition of him reverses that of Elijah: living, he is seen in the chariot of fire; dying, he submits to 'more than the common sorrow of death' (in Giotto's picture this is brought out). . . . We shall find more than mere truth . . . in the casts of drapery if we examine them. They are so simply right in the figure of the Soldan that we do not think of them; we see him only, not his dress. But we see dress first in the figure of the discomfited Magi. Very fully draped personages these, indeed—with trains, it appears, four yards long, and bearers of them.

* *Vid. Suysken, ut supra, xvi. 350, who quotes Saluto (a celebrated traveller of the thirteenth century), vid: also the Continuator of William of Tyre, apud Martene, tom. v.*

"The one nearest the Soldan has done his devoir as bravely as he could. He would fain go up to the fire, but cannot; is forced to shield his face, though he has not turned back. Giotto gives him full sweeping breadth of fold; what dignity he can; a man faithful to his profession, at all events.

"The next one has no such courage. Collapsed altogether, he has nothing more to say for himself or his creed. Giotto hardly hangs the cloak upon him, in Ghirlandajo's fashion, as from a peg, but with ludicrous narrowness of fold. Literally he is a 'shut-up' Magus—closed like a fan. He turns his head away, hopelessly. And the last Magus shows nothing but his back disappearing through the door.

"Opposed to them, in a modern work, you would have had a St. Francis standing as high as he could in his sandals, contemptuous, denunciatory, magnificently showing the Magi the door.

"No such thing says Giotto. A somewhat mean man, disappointing enough in presence—even in feature. I do not understand his gesture, pointing to his forehead—perhaps meaning, 'My life or my head upon the truth of this.' The attendant monk behind him is terror-struck, but will follow his master. The dark, Moorish servants of the Magi show no emotion—will arrange their masters' trains as usual, and decorously sustain their retreat.

"Lastly, for the Soldan himself. In a modern work you would assuredly have had him staring at St. Francis with his eyebrows up, or frowning them deeply at his Magi, with them bent as far down as they would go. Neither of these aspects does he bear according to Giotto. A perfect gentleman and king, he looks at his Magi with

great eyes of decision. He is much the noblest person in the room ; though an infidel, the true hero of the scene, far more than St. Francis. It is evidently the Soldan whom Giotto wants you to think of mainly in this picture of Christian missionary work.

“He does not altogether take the view of the heathen which you would get in an Exeter Hall meeting. Does not expatriate on their ignorance, their blackness, or their nakedness. Does not at all think of the Florentine Islington and Pentonville as inhabited by persons in every respect superior to the kings of the East ; nor does he imagine every other religion but his own to be log-worship. Probably the people who usually worship logs—whether in Persia or Pentonville—will be left to worship logs to their heart’s content, thinks Giotto. But to those who worship God, and who have obeyed the laws of heaven written in their hearts, and numbered the stars of it visible to them—to these a nearer star may rise, and a higher God be revealed.

“You are to note, therefore, that Giotto’s Soldan is the type of all noblest religion and law, in countries where the name of Christ has not been preached. There was no doubt what king or people should be chosen ; the country of the three Magi had already been indicated by the miracle of Bethlehem, and the religion and morality of Zoroaster were the purest, and in spirit the oldest, in the heathen world. Therefore, when Dante in the nineteenth and twentieth books of the Paradise gives his final interpretation of the law of human and divine justice in relation to the gospel of Christ, the lower and enslaved body of the heathen being represented by St. Philip’s convert (‘Christians like these the Ethiop shall condemn’), the noblest state of heathenism is at once chosen,

as by Giotto : 'What may the Persians say unto your kings ?' Compare also Milton :

'At the Soldan's chair
Defied the best of Paynim chivalry.' **

These words of Ruskin's are worth remembering. It is true that they are a criticism on Giotto not on St. Francis. They are in that writer's usual style of exaggeration, and not untouched by his unhappy *υβρις*—or insolent scorn—which has so greatly weakened his influence as a teacher. They are full of mistakes. There were no "Magi," no "fire-worshippers," no connection whatever with "the country of the three Magi." The interview was in Egypt, and St. Francis and Brother Illuminato were before a Mohammedan Sultan. The "Magi" were no "Magi" but simply Mohammedan religious officials. The Mohammedans would have hated "fire-worshippers," and did hate them and fight them as fiercely as they dealt with Christians. But notwithstanding all this series of mistakes, the words quoted bring out vividly what was a fact, and what Giotto did intend to teach—the boldness and simplicity of the great missionary in venturing to preach to the Sultan, his faith and courage in challenging the followers of Islam to the trial by fire; and the noble character of the Sultan Malek-Camel, and the way in which two really great and simple-hearted men—like himself and St. Francis—though so utterly opposed in their religious beliefs, were impressed by, and respected one another.

The story as told by an old chronicler is as follows :

"They (the two missionaries) saluted him (the Sultan)

* Ruskin, *Mornings in Florence*, iii. *Before the Soldan*, pp. 76-84.

and he saluted them ; then he asked them if they wished to be Saracens, or if they had come with a message. They answered that Saracens they would never be, and that they had come with a message from God, and to save his life, if he would believe them. 'For we say, that if you die under this law you are all lost, and for that we are come to you, and if you will listen to us and hear us, we will show you by clear reason, before the wisest men of your land, that you are all lost.' The Sultan said that he had archbishops and bishops of his law, very good clerks, and without them he could not listen to what they said. The clerks answered, 'Of this are we right glad, send and fetch them.' The Sultan sent to fetch them, and there came to him in his tent, eight of the highest and wisest in the land, and the two clerks were there also. And when they were come, the Sultan told them why he had sent for them. And he related to them what the clerk had said. They answered, 'Sire, thou art expert in the law, and art bound to maintain and guard it ; we command thee by Mahomet, who gave it us, that thou have their heads cut off. For we will hear nothing that they say. For the law forbids us to believe in any preaching, and for this we command thee to have their heads cut off.' Then they took leave and went away. The Sultan remained and the two clerks. Then the Sultan came to them and said : 'Seigneurs, they have commanded me by Mahomet and by the law to have your heads cut off. For this the law commands ; but I will go against the commandment. For else I should render you bad guerdon for having risked death to save my soul.'**

It was after this that St. Francis, at the second interview,

* The Continuator of William of Tyre, *et alii Martene.*

made the offer of submitting to the trial by the ordeal of fire. From his courage, we are told, contrasted with the cowardice and reluctance of the Mohammedan ecclesiastics, the Sultan was deeply impressed, and dismissed him with honours, even seeking—in vain—to load him with presents.

Thus St. Francis' foreign mission had again failed. Yet it was not altogether failure, for "high failure is better than low successes." His dauntless courage had an immense effect upon the Crusaders, with whom he remained for some time. There were many conversions, and many who joined the Order. Here is the account given by one who was an eye-witness of these things.

"Master Reynier," he writes, "prior of St. Michel, has entered the Order of Friars Minor. This Order is making rapid progress in the world, because it exactly reproduces the form of the primitive Church, and closely imitates the life of the Apostles. The superior of these brethren was Brother Francis, a man of such goodness that all hold him in veneration. After he came among us, so great was his zeal that he did not fear to go to the army of our enemies, and preach, during several days, the word of God to the Saracens. He had not much success, but on his departure, the Sultan, the King of Egypt, asked him secretly to pray for him, that he might be guided by an inspiration from above and attach himself to the religion most approved of by God. 'Colinus Angelicus,' our clerk, and two other of our companions, to wit, Michel and Master Mathieu, to whom I had entrusted the care of my church, have also entered the Order of Minors, and I can hardly keep back the Cantor and Henry and several others. As to myself, with my body weakened and my heart oppressed by all these separations, I aspire to end

my life in peace and quiet." The good old writer is perplexed by the movement which carried with it so many of his friends, but he is struck by the zeal and mission power and goodness of "Brother Francis."*

It is impossible to speak with certainty of the movements of St. Francis after leaving Egypt. In the Order it is traditionally believed that he visited Palestine and the holy places. There is much that is intrinsically probable in this, Palestine had been assigned as a missionary province to Brother Lucas. Jean de Brienne, the brave crusading commander in Egypt and brother of Walter de Brienne, afterwards entered the Order in Palestine where Bennetto d'Arezzo (who succeeded Lucas) was provincial superior. The mind of Francis had evidently been much turned to Palestine, and indeed the moving spring of his life was a tender, and what might be called personal, devotion to our Blessed Lord. It would appear probable that he would seize this opportunity of visiting the scene of his Master's earthly life.†

It was early in A.D. 1220 when Francis returned to Italy. He landed in Venice and made his way, after some wanderings by Verona and Bologna, to Assisi.‡ His health was greatly weakened by climate and incessant fatigue, but his spiritual energy and inner force were in no way abated. At Bologna he was deeply shocked that his brethren were lodged in a house. That the brethren should have a regular dwelling-place seemed to him a departure from the intention of the Order, and an evasion of the vow of

* Jacques de Vitry, *apud Suysken, Comment. Prav., ut supra*, xviii. 374.

† This is accepted by Milman, *Lat. Christ.*, vol. iv. chap. x. p. 267.

‡ Andreae Dandoli *Chronicon, apud Muratori, Script. Rer. Ital.* vol. xii. par. xxxviii. Wadding, *Ann. Min.*, anno 1220, v. But Suysken (*Comment. Prav. ut supra*) shows reason to doubt that the incident of the birds mentioned by Dandolo occurred then.

poverty on which he laid so much stress. He insisted that all should leave it, and even the sick were removed into the streets. It was only on the intervention of Cardinal Ugolino, who was then in Bologna, that St. Francis consented to revoke the order, and then only after the Cardinal's formal assurance that the house was his property and in no way belonged to the brethren. The movement in Bologna on the approach of St. Francis is a striking proof that, although his direct mission efforts among the Saracens may have failed, yet the influence of his work was telling wide and far. The whole city went out to meet him. Not only were the poor and simple folk moved by this wave of enthusiasm, but the students and professors in the university, one of the greatest centres of learning in Europe, gave him the warmest welcome. St. Francis preached in the city. We have the account from an eye-witness.*

"I, Thomas, citizen of Spalato and Archdeacon of the Cathedral Church of that same city, studying at Bologna in the year 1220, on the day of the Assumption of the Mother of God, saw St. Francis preach on the square, before the little palace, where nearly the whole town was assembled. He spoke first of angels, of men, and of devils. He explained the spiritual natures with such exactness and eloquence that his hearers were astonished that such words could come from the mouth of a man so simple as he was. Nor did he follow the usual course of preachers. His discourse resembled rather one of those harangues that are made by popular orators. At the conclusion, he spoke only of the extinction of hatred, and the urgency of concluding treaties of peace and compacts of union. His

* Wadding, *Ann. Min.*, tom. i. anno 1220, viii.-xv.; see also for similar fact, St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. vii.

garment was soiled and torn, his person thin, his face pale, but God gave his words unheard of power. He converted even men of rank whose unrestrained fury and cruelty had bathed the country in blood ; many who were enemies were reconciled. Love and veneration for the saint were universal ; men and women thronged around him, and happy were those who could so much as touch the hem of his habit."*

As a result of this the learned Professor Giovanni Pepoli gave up his chair and joined the Order. For his few remaining years he adorned it, and was among the first of the men of great learning who, as time went on, lent distinction to it in the minds of men ; he died in 1229. We hear also of two Bolognese students being received among the brethren by St. Francis at this time, viz., Pellegrino di Falterone and Richero di Madona.†

It was, apparently, about this time that, in company with Cardinal Ugolino, he had an interval of repose in a cell at Camaldoli, known ever since by his name, and formerly connected with the name of St. Romualdo. He was for a short time in Florence visiting a convent founded by a noble lady of the family of the Ubaldini, to which he sent Agnese, the sister of Santa Chiara, on his return to Assisi, as a guide to the newly formed convent. After this he returned to Umbria, and reached the Portiuncula in time for the Michaelmas chapter of that year.‡

The early mission efforts of the Franciscans, however, were not confined to St. Francis. His mind had been specially turned towards work among the Saracens. He shared with others of his time the strong enthusiasm for the rescue of the holy places from the hands of the infidel.

* Wadding, *Ann. Min.*, tom. i. anno 1220, xiii. quoting Siganus.

† *Ibid.* viii.-xv.

‡ *Ibid.* xviii.

He did not share altogether—although he did not, of course, oppose—the manner of effecting this which commended itself to the authorities of the Church. It seemed a strange and wrong thing to him that Christian battles should be fought only with the sword, and not with the word of God. To convert the Saracens, not to slaughter them, was his great ambition. If his missionary efforts among them were unsuccessful, at least he set an example to others which was not without effect. We may well, therefore, at once consider the other missionary enterprises abroad inaugurated by him, omitting, for the time being, the events of interest in Franciscan history which took place in Europe. The other mission to Saracens was that which had set out for Spain under the command of Brother Vital. It began with misfortune and ended in tragedy. The chief missionary himself fell ill in Spain and was obliged to give up all thoughts of proceeding further, and to place Brother Bernard in command. He, with his little company, travelled to Portugal and reached Coimbra in safety. They received kind treatment and protection from members of the royal house, and at length advanced to Seville, a city then in the hands of the Saracens.

For a time they remained in concealment, apparently to form their plans. They then made bold attempts to preach in some of the mosques, and, when ejected as madmen, made their way to the presence of the king. By him they were at first sentenced to death, but the sentence was changed, first to imprisonment, and then, in company with some other Christians, to banishment to Morocco. In Morocco at the time, the Infanta Don Pedro, brother of the King of Portugal, held a high command under the Caliph. Notwithstanding his profession of Christianity, his courage, ability, and courtesy

had won the hearts of the Saracens. With great intrepidity, he took the Christian missionaries under his protection, urging them only—so it is said—to prudence and wisdom in the conduct of their mission. In these qualities, unfortunately, they seem to have been singularly wanting, and whilst it is impossible not to admire their courage, it is equally impossible to close our eyes to the fact that they failed in “the wisdom of the serpent” enjoined by our Lord, and seemed to court death in a way which would have been strongly disapproved by the great Fathers at the time of the early persecutions of the Church.

Whilst Brother Bernard was preaching, apparently with more vehemence than wisdom, he and the others were ordered to be seized and conveyed back to their own country. There was unquestionably a want of tact and of the decencies of respect for the authorities, on the part of the missionaries, with which it is impossible to sympathise; and though the account comes to us from sources entirely opposed to the Saracens, and devoted to the Order and the Christian cause, yet it is evident enough from it, that the Saracens acted towards them with great moderation, and that they were sent out of the country, not so much for their Christianity as for insulting the authority of the king.

They were placed under the protection of a guard to conduct them to Ceuta, with a view to embarkation for Europe, but on their way they managed to escape and returned to Morocco. They were soon discovered, and again thrown into prison. It is said that here, for about three weeks, they suffered severely. Their release at the end of that time was apparently accelerated by the fact that various calamities which came upon the country,

were looked upon as divine judgments for the harsh treatment of these Christians. For a time things went well with them. Don Pedro obtained permission for them to accompany an expedition which he was about to lead against some revolted tribes—in the character of chaplains to the Christians in his expeditionary force. They managed to commend themselves to the Moslems during the march, more especially—so it is asserted—by the relief given to the forces when parched with thirst, by a miraculous spring of water which appeared in answer to Brother Bernard's prayer.

This more happy state of things probably induced the brethren on their return to Morocco again to throw aside every semblance of prudence in carrying on their mission work. They preached to the people and even to the king. The patience of the latter seems to have been worn out. It was not merely the preaching of Christianity but the open and almost ostentatious contempt for his authority which provoked him so keenly. He had them handed over to an officer and ordered for immediate execution. It is said that this officer had been a witness of the miracle in the desert, and had been deeply impressed by the brethren. He delayed the execution, merely confined them in prison and used the utmost urgency to move them to greater prudence in prosecuting their work. His efforts were vain, and at last they were given up to punishment.

Whether or not they had unduly courted martyrdom, whether or not they had acted in a manner wanting in Christian wisdom—it is certain that when the great trial came they behaved with exemplary heroism, and God, who did not desert them, recognised them as witnesses to the truth of the revealed Faith. They seem

to have been tortured with savage cruelty. They were dragged through the streets, cruelly beaten, rolled on sharp pieces of glass and tiles, and had their bleeding wounds rubbed with vinegar to intensify their sufferings. There was no failure of constancy, however. The chronicles relate that miraculous light was seen in the prison, astonishing the guards, who, expecting to find the prisoners gone, found them with calmness and even joy engaged in prayer. The king himself paid them a visit in prison, and, having failed to do so by pain, tried to shake their steadfastness by tempting promises. At last, enraged by their determined rejection of all his offers, in one of those sudden rushes of rage not uncommon among Orientals, he executed them with his own hands. They died on January 16, 1220. Their bodies were subjected to mutilation and various indignities. Don Pedro rescued some relics, enclosed them in silver shrines, and abandoning further connection with the Moors, returned to Portugal. The relics of the martyrs were received with the greatest honour at Coimbra, and finally deposited in the Church of the Canons Regular of St. Cross.*

As was sure to be the case, St. Francis was deeply moved on learning the story of the mission to Morocco. To him and to all at the time it would appear that—whether their action had or had not been altogether prudent—God had set the seal of martyrdom to the work of the Order. From this martyrdom, also, certainly followed a very remarkable gain to the brotherhood. As St. Paul was won to the early Church by the prayers and sufferings of St. Stephen, so the example of the Franciscan

* *Anales Franciscana*, tom. i. p. 3; cf. also *Fleury, Hist. Eccles.*; *Wadding, Ann. Min.*, tom. i., anno 1220, xxxvii-xliii.; *Acta Sanctorum, Januar.* 16, p. 66, &c.

martyrs in Africa led to the conversion of Fernandez de Bouillon, known in the Order as St. Anthony of Padua. His first desire and first effort was to go to preach to the Moors in Morocco. Severe illness and intense bodily weakness forced him to return. The work, however, which he had vainly hoped to do in Africa, it was given to him to do in Italy, and there he became one of the most remarkable workers in the great movement created by God's blessing on the labours of St. Francis.

Thus closed the most striking efforts of the early Franciscans in that cause which seemed so deeply to touch the heart of the founder—the conversion of the followers of Mahomet. “*L'homme propose mais Dieu dispose.*” In the sense in which St. Francis had hoped and intended these efforts were not successful. Successful they were, however, in other ways. They impressed upon the brethren themselves their wide reach and the true spirit of their work. Like the Christian Church they were to love man as man, and do what in them lay to bring fallen and sin-bound men to the love of Christ, and so to freedom. They were not to rely upon force or the civil sword, but to fight their battles with truly Christian weapons, and in the temper of which St. Francis himself was such a conspicuous example—the temper of generous love, entire self-sacrifice, and unfaltering courage. The Franciscan body—with whatever faults—had this lesson deeply impressed upon them. They never at their worst fell so low as the Dominicans. They were never the ministers of such organised cruelty, in the name of religion, as the atrocious system of the Inquisition.

And the Franciscan missionary effort had a powerful effect upon the European nations. Wide and far it was more and more beginning to be felt that these men were

in real earnest. The idea of the Crusaders had entered deep into the minds of the nations. They were well aware, also, of the extremity of danger to which Christians were exposed in meeting Moslem fanaticism. And to find the followers of St. Francis—so many of them cultured and high-born men—exposing their lives with reckless courage to advance the cause of the Cross, not by arms but by apostolic devotion, and extending the same self-sacrificing efforts to the hated infidel which they showed to the careless followers of Christ, sent an electric thrill through the nations of Europe. With all their faults, men in the Middle Ages were more simple than in our own more *blasé* days ; if love had often died down within them, so that wickedness was abounding, yet faith had not died, and there was that strong admiration for those who were seen to live and act on the faith they had, even to the death, and to do so with an abounding charity towards all men that no scorn nor cruelty could check or destroy.

It was in this way that the Franciscan movement grew. Numbers were awakened and moved to a higher life, not merely by preaching but also by example. Bologna was stirred to its depths, and many important additions were made to the Order by Francis' courageous efforts in Egypt ; and the martyrs of Morocco moved many souls in Portugal and Spain and Italy, and added to the brotherhood St. Anthony of Padua.

In the few years from 1216 to 1221 the Franciscan Order had advanced with unparalleled rapidity. It no longer was exercising a considerable sway only in Italy, it had become a force throughout the civilised world.

CHAPTER VIII

SOME IMPORTANT INCIDENTS IN EARLY FRANCISCAN HISTORY

THERE are certain incidents in the rise of the Franciscan Order which are of great interest, and deserve special study. Of these, one is the Indulgence of the Portiuncula.

The doctrine of indulgences fell into grave disrepute at the time of the Reformation. This arose from some of the terrible abuses connected with their sale. At the time of which we write, however, there was a very different feeling on the subject, and if we would understand the sense of importance attached to this incident in Franciscan history, it is well to endeavour to understand what is meant, rightly or wrong, by the Roman theory of indulgences.

The theory of Roman writers on the subject seems to be this, that there is a temporal penalty due to sin for which satisfaction must be made ; that man is unable to make this satisfaction himself, and that he can therefore draw upon the treasure of the Church. In this there are two important questions : (1) as to the temporal satisfaction for sin, and (2) as to the treasure of the Church.

The whole theory appears to have developed out of the early and severe penitential discipline of the Church. It would appear that the system of public penances lasted

in the Church for several centuries, for a longer time in the West than in the East. Then there arose a practice of shortening the penances for sins committed, in consideration of the sufferings of the martyrs. At a later period the rigour of penances was greatly softened in consequence of the Crusades. In the case of these expeditions, which so moved the heart of Christendom, indulgences were granted so that long years of canonical penance were remitted to those who assumed the Cross.

The penances affixed to the commission of certain sins were supposed to take the place of the temporal punishments for those sins which would be exacted by the justice of Almighty God. These were held to be necessary for all. Guilt and the danger of eternal punishment were cancelled by God's forgiveness upon true repentance, but it was held that, even so, temporal penalties were demanded for the sins thus forgiven. The idea of indulgences arose then from some true thoughts about the seriousness of sin. It was felt that even forgiven sin, in the mind of a sincere penitent, will be felt so deeply that it will lead him from love of God to subject himself to deserved discipline, and make all the satisfaction in his power. It was felt also that sin, even when forgiven, has serious consequences, and that if sin is to be viewed in its true colours it demands from the soul an effort of discipline, what St. Paul describes as "revenge."* Hence the early and severe penitential discipline of the Church; hence the anxious and willing desire of penitent sinners to undergo some punishment for their sins. The time came when it was evidently necessary to mitigate this severity. From this arose the notion of indulgences. How easily they could be abused

* 2 Cor. vii. 11.

is evident. At first, however, they were looked upon as a mitigated form of religious discipline and satisfaction for sin on the part of forgiven penitents.

It is curious and—to us somewhat startling—how these penances came to be reckoned. The system hardened into a debtor and creditor account, startling in its highly businesslike arrangement. It was considered that a gift of alms together with the recitation of some particular Psalm was equivalent to, say, one year's penance. Hence it followed that fifty times the amount of alms together with fifty such recitations were equivalent to fifty years' penance. And this explains to us the notice seen so often in Roman churches of "Indulgence of fifty years," or "Indulgence of a hundred years, and so on," and the frequent mention of "Indulgenced Prayers." This custom seems to have crept in about the ninth century. The custom arose also of granting indulgences to those who made pilgrimages to the tombs of the Apostles; and then further it began to become customary to grant indulgences upon the occasion of the consecration of churches, and the anniversaries of such solemnities.

It was probably at the time of the Crusades that indulgences became plenary. The Crusades were looked upon as the noblest possible act of religious self-denial, always entailing suffering, often death. Hence the act was considered to be one which gave entire satisfaction for the temporal penalty of sin. Plenary indulgences, as well as those for given numbers of years, have ever since held their ground in the Roman Church.

The second idea existing as a ground for the doctrine of indulgences was that the Church possessed a "treasure" in the merits of Christ and of the saints and martyrs, from which "treasure" could be drawn, from time to time,

satisfaction for the temporal penalties of sin. And the third fundamental idea in the matter was that this "treasure" could only be dispensed by the Church, and especially by the Pope. The "treasure" was to be used (1) for the remission of guilt, by the giving of sanctifying grace to the penitent soul—hence the sacrament of penance; (2) for the remission of temporal punishment; hence the granting of indulgences. What was meant by this, rightly or wrongly, and how readily that which had some truth in it might harden into a system likely to deprive it of life and reality, may be seen best by the following exposition.

"The difference," writes an eminent Roman ecclesiastic, "between subjection to guilt and indebtedness to penalty of sin creates a difference in the manner in which the one and the other are remitted. Guilt not admitting of expiation, except by the infusion of sanctifying grace communicated only by virtue of the sacraments, has need of a sacrament in order to its remission, but temporal penalties which remain to be paid after the stains of the guilt have been removed do not require for their remission sanctifying grace to be infused afresh, but rather they suppose this grace as already received into the soul.

"The dispensing of these temporal penalties is, however, an exercise of jurisdiction, not an act of sacramental administration so as to require the episcopal or sacerdotal character. Accordingly, it only requires jurisdiction in the legitimate dispenser of the treasure of the Church from which, as Pope Alexander III. said, it follows that only the subjects of the bishop who grants the indulgence can enjoy its fruit, since the faithful can neither be loosed nor bound except by their own proper judge. 'Cum a non suo judice ligari nullus valeat vel absolvi' ('Since no

one can be either bound or loosed except by his own judge'). Hence a bishop-elect, canonically instituted, although not consecrated, is able to grant indulgences, whilst a bishop *in partibus infidelium*, or titular bishop, or even a coadjutor bishop with the right of future succession, or dimissory bishop, does not possess this power, inasmuch as he has no sheepfold upon which he can exercise his jurisdiction.

"The Roman Pontiff himself alone, as enjoying a universal jurisdiction, has the power to grant indulgences of every kind to all the Catholic world, whether partial or plenary, in his quality of pastor and supreme judge of all the faithful and sovereign administrator of the spiritual goods of the Church.

"According to the existing discipline of the Church, regulated by the tenth Lateran Council held in the year 1215 under Pope Innocent III., bishops can only grant one year's indulgence on the day of the dedication or consecration of a church, and forty days on all other occasions; and this only in their own dioceses. If, however, an indulgence is attached by the bishop to a church, or oratory, or a cross, &c.—in a word, if the indulgence be local—it may be gained by strangers to the diocese who may visit the privileged spot for this intention."^{*}

Here is an authoritative exposition of the matter. It will be readily seen how, viewed in this way, there was a real danger—a danger so often evident in the Roman communion—of over-systematising. There are several points, however, in connection with this subject which are further worthy of notice.

(1) There is nothing to be gained by unfairness; and it is foolish and unfair to talk of indulgences as though

* From Sarra, *On Indulgences*, the English translation and abridgment.

the whole system were altogether bad. This can scarcely be true of any line of belief which, though distorted or exaggerated, has held sway over a large part of the Christian Church. It is still more unfair, and, indeed, argues ignorance of the subject, to speak of the system as one intended to permit men to continue in sin with an undisturbed conscience. This is an entire misunderstanding.

(2) Again there was, of course, as has been remarked already, a number of real truths which lay at the foundation of the doctrine and practice of indulgences. It is really true, for example, that sin is the most serious thing in the world, that it brings guilt and entails consequences; true, that our Lord's merits are infinite; true, that there is real prevailing power in the prayers and merits of His saints by virtue of their union with Him;* true that there is power of government and discipline given by Him to His Church.

But (3) the systematising of all this into such a system of debtor and creditor and giving of dates for payment, if we may so say, as is made out in the arrangements gradually growing as to indulgences, is human, not divine, and open to any amount of abuse. Above all, the gradual acceptance of the vast fabric of papal domination built upon such slender ground—this was not true. The pretence that because of our Lord's words to St. Peter the Roman Pontiff had a plenary power of binding and loosing in all cases and under all circumstances was a *fons et origo malorum* which led to disastrous consequences. That the system of indulgences became subject to the gravest abuse, we know; for a time, however, it represented much that was true or harmless.

* Cf. St. Paul's Epistle to Colossians, i. 24.

For (4) practically for long (and probably at the present time) the meaning amounted to this—viz, giving special encouragement to certain prayers or devotional practices. It may be considered to have been an over-bold way of saying to a sinner: "For your sins now that they are forgiven after true repentance you still deserve temporal punishment. You doubtless desire to make all the satisfaction you can, united as your action is with the infinite merits of your Redeemer. Well, obey the direction of your spiritual teachers, and use such and such prayers devoutly, or visit such and such sacred places with devout thoughts and prayer—and that will glorify God and benefit your soul." In this way was a real meaning in indulgences over-systematised at last, unfortunately, and crystallised into a stiff, immobile condition, like so much else in the Roman Church, and above all depending upon that growing ultramontane view, as we should now call it, as to the See of Peter.

The Council of Lateran in 1215 may be considered as the great reforming Council of the Middle Ages, just as the Council of Trent was of the sixteenth century. Among other things, both councils introduced reforms in this very question of indulgences. But for the exaggerated view taken of papal authority in the matter, there is therefore much in the teaching of indulgences, so reformed, with which the Anglican Church and other parts of the Catholic Church can entirely agree, while condemning certain "Romish doctrines" with regard to them and other practices, which these reforming Roman councils would, probably, likewise condemn.

Now one of the most remarkable of indulgences was the "Indulgence of the Portiuncula," and the granting of

this indulgence is one of the most striking incidents in the opening days of the Franciscan Order.

It is a curious fact that the early historians of St. Francis do not mention it. The Bollandists speak of it with caution and reserve. Nevertheless there can now be no doubt that the tradition of the granting of this famous indulgence is a true tradition, that the "Fioretti" here can be followed if not in every detail, at least in the general story.

The story is as follows :

At the Council of the Lateran in 1215 Innocent III. seemed to be at the zenith of his power. He had thrown himself into the reforms on which he had set his heart, and he had carried the assembly completely with him. His ideas were large, his aspirations lofty. If in his sermons with which he opened the Council there is still the abundance of allegory which to our taste appears far-fetched and ill-timed, still there is no mistaking the lofty spirit which animated him, and the ideal ever before his eyes. He has a high sense of the greatness of his office, but it is the dignity of suffering with a suffering world which moves him, rather than the idea of ruling. The life, however, which this great pontiff desired to expend on great projects was drawing fast to its close. Bent on the new Crusade above all, and desirous of healing the quarrel between Genoa and Pisa which seemed likely to hinder its accomplishment, he quitted Rome in the April of 1216, and arrived in Perugia by the end of May. At Perugia the Pope was attacked by a malignant fever. He lingered until July 16, and died about five in the morning. Never was a more saddening scene than the death of Innocent. He had been singularly liberal and generous to those who were connected with his household, but self-seeking,

greed and trickery were stronger in the papal palace than gratitude.* As soon as it was evident that the end was approaching he was utterly abandoned by all for whom he had done so much. The story of this heartlessness is alas ! not a solitary story. Others of his successors were treated with the same brutal neglect, so that we do not wonder at the reflection of an old writer that "there is no beggar, nay, indeed, no man, who has a death more miserable than that of a Pope."† Innocent died on July 16. On the 17th he was buried, and the following day took place the election of his successor. On the day of the Pope's death a Frenchman, Jacques de Vitry, arrived in Perugia. We possess now what may be called his *journal intime*, and the publication of this short but invaluable MS. has thrown much light upon this part of the history of the thirteenth century, and especially placed beyond question what has been recorded, though hitherto doubtfully, as to this episode in the life of St. Francis.

"From Milan," writes Jacques de Vitry, "I came to a town of the name of Perugia, where Pope Innocent had just died though he was still unburied. During the night thieves had stripped him of his precious vestments, and left his body almost naked, and with unmistakable signs of corruption in the middle of the church. I went thither and I saw with my eyes, how short, vain, and deceptive is the glory of this world."

The end of the Pontiff had come suddenly, though he had been ailing for some months. The cardinals had, therefore, had no time to form their plans or carry on the usual intrigues for the pontifical throne. The people of Perugia were determined that there should be no delay

* Innocent III., *Gesta*, apud Migne, tom. i. 222, &c.

† Frater Mansuetus, *Analecta Franciscana*, i. p. 253.

in the election, and consequently they deprived the cardinals of liberty and almost of food, which had the desired effect of bringing them to a prompt decision. It is from this the custom of "inclosing" the Sacred College, and allowing the members of it but scanty fare arose. Nineteen out of the twenty-seven cardinals who then composed the Sacred College were in Perugia at the time. Of these there were two who seemed secure of commanding the largest number of votes. These were Ugolino, Bishop of Ostia, and Guido, Bishop of Palestrina. The other cardinals fearing the disfavour of the future Pope in case they did not happen to vote for the one who turned out to be successful, insisted that these two should arrange the election between them. Cardinal Cencio, of the house of the Savelli, appeared the most improbable of candidates. He was a man of no great eminence, of gentleness of character and great piety, but possessing no commanding influence. He had two recommendations, however, which turned the scale in his favour, he had weak health and was advanced in years. It did not appear probable that he would stand long in the way of more able aspirants to the tiara, and accordingly the cardinals Guido and Ugolino united in nominating him to the vacant pontifical throne. He was thus elected on July 18, 1216, and assumed the name of Honorius III. It was felt also that a man of force and ability could really manage affairs rather than the aged pontiff himself, and so take care to make himself safe for the succession. Honorius, as a matter of fact, lived for a longer time than had been anticipated, but the Cardinal Ugolino held, in reality, the reins of government, and secured to himself the succession as Gregory IX.* It is

* Cf. Ciaconius, *Vita. Pontif. Rom.*, tom. i. 659-661.

thus that Jacques de Vitry continues : "The cardinals elected Honorius, a good and religious old man, very simple and benevolent, who had given to the poor almost all that he possessed."

The comment made upon this by an eminent writer on the life of St. Francis, is much to the point. He writes as follows :

" Such a eulogium is worth noticing, above all in an epoch when it was already a glorious thing for a prelate not to be simoniacal. Honorius III. had a special merit in having made himself worthy of it, since at the time of his election, he was *Camerarius*, that is to say, Treasurer of the Holy See. *Hic dies suos in pace dispositus*, another of his contemporaries has said of him, and this praise gathers up admirably the interior thought of his reign. It was not from weakness, as one might be tempted to suppose, that he sought for peace ; he wished for it with energy and acted accordingly. . . . One may well imagine the impression produced on such a man as Honorius by the spectacle of the unimaginable acts of baseness which were then the ordinary accompaniment of every pontifical election."* This is true, though there is no need to go into particulars, but the "vampires" who hung round the Roman Court at the moment were of the lowest class, and they were legion. It would be unfair to speak of them as men sometimes do, as if they hung round only the Roman Court. There was probably plenty of the same thing elsewhere, but the tragedy of the situation was this, that in spite of even the greatness of Innocent III., that which was considered at the time the highest position in Christendom, the position, as men had been then persuaded to believe, of the Vicar of Christ,

* Paul Sabatier, in the *Revue Chrétienne*, Aug. 1896.

was beset by such creatures. We should remember this in order to realise the immense effect upon the mind of such a man as the new Pope, produced by the lofty simplicity and unworldliness of Francis and his companions. However, this is brought out by Jacques de Vitry, an eyewitness at the time. In his private journal he continues thus :

“ During my sojourn at the Pontifical Court, I have seen many things which have deeply saddened me ; they are so busy there with temporal and secular affairs, with all that concerns kings and kingdoms, with quarrels and lawsuits, that it is almost impossible to speak there about religious matters.

“ I have, nevertheless, found in these countries one subject of consolation ; it is, that many persons of both sexes, rich and living in the world, leave all for the love of Christ and renounce the world. They are called Friars Minor. The Pope and the cardinals hold them in great respect. As to themselves, they disentangle themselves completely from temporal things, and make, every day, the most energetic efforts to snatch perishing souls from the vanities of this world and to draw them into their ranks. Thanks to God, their labour has already produced much fruit, and they have conquered many souls ; so much so, that one who hears them calls others, and one audience summons another audience.

“ They live according to the fashion of the primitive Church, of which it is written : ‘ the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul.’ During the day, they go into the towns and villages to win souls and to work ; at night they betake themselves to hermitages or places apart to have leisure for contemplation.

“ The women dwell together near cities in convents,

receive nothing, but live by the work of their hands. They are much troubled and annoyed if they see themselves honoured more than they would wish, whether by the clergy or the laity.

“The men of this Order meet together, not without great benefit, once a year, in a place fixed beforehand, to rejoice in the Lord and to have their meals together; then, with the advice of good men, they adopt and promulge holy resolutions, and such as are approved by the Pope. After that they disperse for the rest of the year through Lombardy and Tuscany, and even as far as Sicily. Brother Nicholas, who is of the same country as the Pope, a holy and religious man, has recently left the Curia to become one of them, but as he is indispensable to the Pope, he has been recalled by him.

“I think that it is to put the prelates, who are like dogs incapable of barking, to shame, that the Lord wills before the end of the world to raise many souls by means of these simple and poor men.”

From this striking testimony of a contemporary and an eye-witness, one of the most precious documents of the thirteenth century, we have evidence of several things. (1) The extraordinary extension and activity of the early Franciscans; (2) The wonderful impression they produced upon not only men in general but upon the Pontifical Court; (3) That there is more history, as distinct from mere poetry, than it has been usual to imagine, in the narratives of the “Fioretti,” as we see by the allusion to the Franciscan chapters, spoken of very much as the “Fioretti” speak of the “Chapter of Mats,” of which, or at any rate of some such important chapter, it is evident Jacques de Vitry had heard during his stay at Perugia.

The important point is that this valuable document

proves the close relation of Francis with the Papacy, and makes it in the highest degree probable—to say the least of it—that Honorius would be just the man to grant the indulgence of the Portiuncula, and in the way in which it is related on respectable authority that he did.

It is certain that Francis was in Perugia at the time of the Pope's death. He may have been witness of the shameless and worldly conduct connected with that tragic event. If so it is not unnatural to suppose that his heart was wrung with anguish at the cruel treatment meted out to "The Lady Poverty" whom he loved so well, and he may well have wished—as it has been justly remarked—that "the prelates who lavished upon him the most embarrassing testimonies of admiration would give less kindly attention to himself, and more to his ideas."*

At any rate the election of Honorius III. must have been to him a source of very considerable satisfaction. Here was a man, raised to the pontifical throne, who was, in fact, if not in name, a Minor; one who despised the goods of this world, and valued poverty.

Shortly after the election—so the story goes—St. Francis, accompanied by Brother Masseo, set out again for Perugia. With his simple faith, taking things as he found them, and making the best of what he found, he had, of course, an unquestioning trust in the efficacy of indulgences, and in the power to grant them as inherent in the Holy See. His one desire was to advance the glory of God, and deepen the devotions of His people. He journeyed, therefore, to Perugia, to pray for an unprecedented benefit.

The feeling of St. Francis appears to have been this. He not only desired that there should be conversions; he

* Paul Sabatier, *ut supra*, p. 106.

desired that those who had turned from the world and given themselves to God, should have definite attestation of the renewal of His favour. This, indeed, is no vain desire. It is true that in the case of great saints, and of men of lofty spiritual temper, this is hardly needed, just as it is not felt to be needed by those who have had no sense, deep and terrible, of sin, and no deep or agonising repentance. With ordinary, and yet sincerely penitent sinners, it is altogether otherwise. Christ Himself did not "break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax." It is—among other reasons—because palpable evidence of forgiveness is so desired by a sinner in penitence that the Sacrament of Penance itself was instituted; and indulgences—in their best aspect—had something of the same advantage. At any rate, Francis would look upon the grant of an indulgence as a blessing to console penitents, and give evidence to the fearful that they could turn over a fresh page in their history.

The Roman theory of indulgences requires that they are only of avail to those who are truly repentant, who have made their confession, and their communion. To be in this state of grace is the first and chief condition of using an indulgence. It is only granted *vere pénitentibus*—i.e., to those truly penitent. This, as we have seen, is supposed to arise not so much from the will of the Sovereign Pontiff, as from the nature of an indulgence "which is directed *per se* to remit temporal penalties, outside the sacrament of penance, to those who have true contrition for their sins."* The next chief condition is to fulfil with exactness the particular works enjoined. Sometimes "these pious works may be merely internal, as, e.g., internal acts of virtue."† If the work is omitted the

* Sarra, *On Indulgences*.

† *Ibid.*

indulgence is not gained, because the actual penance has not been done. Sometimes (such is the theory and practice) the Sovereign Pontiff commutes the works enjoined, especially at times of jubilee. The works enjoined are sometimes visits to churches, sometimes prayer, sometimes communion, and so on; but so curiously systematised is this strange businesslike arrangement between heaven and earth, that in a decree of the Sacred Congregation of February 29, 1864, "it is defined that whenever any one desires to gain many plenary indulgences a separate visit is required for each indulgence." "It is not enough," so the decree runs, "to repeat the prayers or visits without leaving the church, but after each visit the person wishing to gain a fresh indulgence must go out of the church and then re-enter it."* There is something strangely grotesque to the minds of ordinary Christians to think of God's gifts being dependent upon acts of this kind. It was certainly the custom in the time of St. Francis that no indulgence should be granted without an offering of alms. St. Francis, with his simple faith, and yet his large and loving soul, could not be bound by many of the extraordinary limitations and conditions which seemed to hedge in such an important gift from God, and, indeed, to make it depend so largely on the will, almost the caprice, of the Sovereign Pontiff. He had a faith in the pontifical power, which then was assumed on all hands, when the critical examination of its foundations was scarcely possible, but he had a large love for souls, and his interview with Pope Honorius is a remarkable instance of his simplicity of character and earnestness of purpose.

On his arrival at Perugia, he was introduced to the

* *Sarra, ut supra.*

Pope's presence by Cardinal Ugolino. He opened the subject at once.

"Most Holy Father," he said, "some time ago I repaired for you a church dedicated to the Virgin Mother of Christ. I entreat your Holiness to place there, on the occasion of its dedication, an indulgence without the condition of giving an alms."

At such a request the Pope was naturally startled. At that time every indulgence carried with it this condition—that an alms in proportion to the means of the suppliant should be given. This was not necessarily a sordid rule, badly as it was afterwards abused. It was only an encouragement to the Gospel practice of almsgiving as well as prayer. To the large mind of Francis the necessity of such a condition, if souls were to be helped, would appear out of the question.

"And for how many years," continued the astonished Pope, "do you ask for this indulgence?"

"Most Holy Father," was the answer, "it is not for years that I ask your Holiness, but for souls."

The various scales of "so many years" indulgence, and all the exact calculation of the amount of temporal punishment to be remitted and the amount of "treasure" to be expended, could never take hold of a generous and loving heart such as Francis'.

"What do you mean by that?" went on the Pope.

"Most Holy Father," answered Francis, "I would wish, if your Holiness permits it, that all those who shall betake themselves to this church with contrition for their sins, and after having made their confessions and having received absolution, should obtain the remission of all their sins, whether of guilt or of penalty, in heaven and on earth, from the day of their

baptism to the day and hour of their entrance of this church."

The Pope was more than ever startled. Nor was it to be wondered at. In the Council of the Lateran only one year before this very question had been dealt with. In the sixty-second canon of that Council a restraint had been put upon the granting of indulgences. It had then been ordered that in the dedication of basilicas, even where a number of bishops assisted, the indulgence was not to pass the limit of one year. Francis asked for nothing less than a complete revolution in this lately established discipline, and as the Pope himself had been a member of the Council the proposition must have been sufficiently startling.

St. Francis, however, believed that he had the direct sanction of our Lord Himself. It is said that spending a night in prayer for sinners he had a vision of the Redeemer, and that praying Him for this indulgence our Lord had granted his prayer, commanding that it should be ratified by his "Vicar." There can be little doubt of the *bona fides* of St. Francis in his belief in this, and his strong conviction carried all before it. To his startling prayer, therefore, when the Pope answered, "It is not the custom of the Roman Curia to grant such an indulgence," Francis had his rejoinder ready :

"Sire, it is not I who make this demand, but He on whose behalf I come—the Lord Jesus Christ."

"Yes, I grant you this indulgence," was the Pope's reply.

Francis had overcome in a matter which he and others at the time deemed of vast importance, and had overcome by his simple faith and love for souls. The cardinals

present interposed. They represented that to grant such an indulgence was unheard of, and pointed out, with a delicate appreciation of the business aspect of the question that, if granted, the indulgence for the Crusades and for the apostolic basilicas would lose their value. The Pope stood firm. He refused to go back upon his word, but so far modified the grant as to limit the duration of the indulgence (instead of extending over the octave of dedication) to one natural day. The precise words of the Pope are worth being recorded :

"Henceforth," said he, "we grant that whosoever shall come and enter this church, truly penitent, and after making confession, be absolved from every penalty and all guilt of sin, and we will that this indulgence have force every year, for ever, only during one day from first vespers to the vespers of the following day."

Francis was about to withdraw full of joy at his success. The Pope upbraided him as a simpleton for going unprovided with any legal proof of what he had obtained. Francis' answer is characteristic : "If this indulgence," he said, "is God's work, I leave to Him the task of manifesting His own work. I have no need of having any instrument concerning it, only let the Blessed Virgin Mary be the charter, Jesus Christ the notary, and the angels the witnesses."

One knows not which is most striking ; the extraordinary nature of the transaction, supposed to be a businesslike matter between earth and heaven, or the horror of the cardinals at the apparent infringement of regulation, and risking of proper advantages, or the simple, large and generous love and faith of Francis, which could not be bound by rigid conventionalities, and carried all before it to the end he desired.

On his return to Assisi, the festival of the dedication of the Santa Maria degli Angeli took place on August 2. Seven bishops assisted. There were solemn and elaborate ceremonies, repeated still when the solemn day comes round year by year, and the great news—the grant of the indulgence—was proclaimed to all.

Such is the story of the celebrated indulgence of the Portiuncula, which has held a unique place in this department of the teachings and practices of the Roman Church ever since.

In commenting on it, one able to write on St. Francis, already quoted, observes :

“The ceremonial of this festival (the dedication of Santa Maria degli Angeli) since the thirteenth century has not, so to speak, varied, but whilst nowadays the multitude are present, passive and indifferent as to the rites whose deep significance completely escapes them, they were present then ardent and passionate, as if at a sort of duel between God and the powers of darkness. As they saw unrolled all the gamut of benedictions, aspersions, and unctions, they felt the same sort of emotion that the sailor feels when, after going through a thousand dangers, he succeeds in unfurling the flag of his country on some lonely rock in the ocean.”*

It is true. Francis appealed from a vivid faith in his own soul to the crude but simple faith of his time. It was not, however, a system, however elaborated, that moved his contemporaries, nor was it power that overwhelmed them ; it was the grace of God acting through the influence of a true and self-sacrificing life. It is not, nor ever can be, a frozen system that can convert and

* Paul Sabatier, *ibid.* p. 111.

save the souls of men, but the living, life-giving power of a self-forgetting and loving heart.*

The second incident of importance in the early days of the Franciscans was the important assembly known as "the Chapter of Mats."

Many of the foreign missions of the brethren had been hitherto crowned with small success, as we have already seen. Numbers of Franciscans seem to have returned, especially from Germany, dejected and unhappy at their failure. Still, in Italy, the order was growing, and the numbers, considering the short time it had existed, were astonishing. Francis apparently had begun to feel the need of greater organisation, and strong support. The story is told that in this, as in so many things, he was guided by a dream. He saw in his dream and behold a little black hen appeared with the feet of a dove, but her chickens were so many that she felt powerless to shelter them under her wings. In this image he saw himself and his children of the Order. He saw that there were dangers from without, and he foresaw that there must soon be dangers from within. The divisions and disagreements, the jealousies and divergences of opinion, which came in after a time, Francis saw, with his usual foresight and large common sense, were sure to come. He needed

* The first impressions of M. Paul Sabatier, in his valuable *Vie de Saint François d'Assise*, were entirely opposed to the truth of the Indulgence of the Portiuncula. He, in fact, rejected *en bloc* the traditional documents. Further researches have led him to change his opinions. In particular, the publication of a letter or *journal intime* of Jacques de Vitry (published first in the *Nouveaux Mémoires de l'Académie de Bruxelles*, tom. xxiii, pp. 29, &c.) has convinced him of the entire truth of the story of the Indulgence of the Portiuncula, and that Papini and others have been over hasty in doubting the marvellously rapid increase in numbers of the Friars Minor. See as above, *Revue Chrétienne*, Aug. 1896, *Un nouveau chapitre de la Vie de Saint François d'Assise*, by Paul Sabatier.

all the support that could be obtained, and accordingly resolved to place the Order still more closely under the protection of the Holy See. It was evidently impossible that the Pope himself, with all his weight of care and business, could be asked to attend directly and in person to the needs of the Order, but what was possible was this, that some person of eminence might be appointed by the Pope to "rule, protect, and correct" the Order. At the request of Francis, the Cardinal Bishop of Ostia was appointed. This was considered by Francis an important point, and in the last rule composed by him he directed those who followed him to pursue the same plan. The example thus set by the Franciscans of appointing a Protector of the Order, has been followed in many of the religious communities since. Immediately after his appointment Cardinal Ugolino undertook to be present and preside at the chapter which was to assemble at Whitsuntide in the year 1219.

The brethren were assembled from all parts. They flocked to the Portiuncula in immense numbers. It is said that there were as many as five thousand, and even if this be an exaggerated statement, there can be no doubt that the numbers were already very great indeed.

The citizens of Assisi had already erected a building of considerable size to house the brethren. Francis had at first strongly objected, as he objected in the case of Bologna, but he had been persuaded by one Di Bartona—a man of importance in Assisi, acting in the name of the commune—to accede to the wishes of the citizens that it should be used by the brethren.

This building, which had probably only just been erected, was now to be used also to accommodate Cardinal Ugolino and his suite.

How were the vast multitudes of the brethren who were arriving from all quarters to be housed? This difficult question was solved in the following way. Large quantities of reeds and rushes were gathered, and from these were woven booths. The booths were placed in lines with entire regularity; and in the beautiful valley below the rocky heights of Assisi they must have presented a striking appearance. The people in the neighbouring towns and villages were startled by the unusual spectacle, and from the peculiar appearance of these improvised habitations, they gave to the chapter the title by which it has since been known of "the Chapter of Mats."*

When the brethren arrived from all directions, they continued their usual religious exercises, as though they had been in their several settlements. To us the question of feeding such a multitude, living under a rule of absolute poverty, would appear a very serious one, and indeed an insoluble problem. Nothing bears greater testimony to the extraordinary vitality of the movement, to the deep stirring of the minds of men, and to the unique influence of St. Francis, than the fact that this did not turn out to be a practical difficulty. From all quarters, from Assisi, from Foligno, from Spoleto, from Perugia, men came in numbers, carrying provisions for the brethren "without money and without price." Carts arrived laden with food. In some cases cooking utensils and drinking glasses and such things were offered, and the simple peasantry and the wealthy vied with one another in supplying all that was needed for the Friars.

It is said that this deeply impressed St. Dominic. He is said to have attended the chapter, moved by his admira-

* Eccleston, *De Adventu Frat. Min. in Anglia*, p. 26. Wadding, *Ann. Min.*, tom. i., anno 1219.

tion for St. Francis, and that seeing the severe consistency with which the rule of "Holy Poverty" was carried out, he adopted the Franciscan idea into the rule of his own order, with that striking and childlike *abandon* to a religious practice, however extreme, so characteristic of the age.

When the Cardinal arrived, having ridden from Rome, the brethren went in procession to meet him, and received him with honour. To show his entire desire to identify himself with them, he wore the Franciscan habit over the imperial purple. He visited the little chapel for prayer, then inspected the lodgings of the brethren, and on the day following that of his arrival—Whitsunday—celebrated the Mass. On this occasion, St. Francis acted as deacon and sang the gospel. It is said that he also preached. Some time was spent, of course, in religious exercises of a more private and personal character, in which St. Francis, as usual, helped his brethren both by example and advice.

It was in this chapter that the more regular organisation of the Order was first thoroughly attended to. It was now arranged by the Cardinal, with the assent of St. Francis, that the various missions were to be in some degree less dependent on Assisi. Henceforth, owing to increasing distance, the heads of the various missions were to have power to receive brethren and give the habit without the necessity of going to headquarters. It was now, too, that those who went to a distance were provided with Letters Apostolic to serve as credentials so that they might be well received by the bishops, be freed from suspicion, and looked upon as a recognised Order.*

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita*, cap. ii. 100. There is some doubt here in the chronology. The Bollandists speak with great reserve as to this being the

It is said—probably with some exaggeration, but perhaps also with some truth—that it was at this chapter that St. Francis took occasion to check some extreme forms of physical mortification to which the devotion and enthusiasm of the brethren had led them. The actual statements of the “*Fioretti*” on this subject may be over-coloured, but there is strong probability in the main facts. In spite of his intense belief in self-denial and poverty St. Francis in this, as in so many other things, displayed wonderful common sense. These are said to have been his words, uttered possibly on this occasion or, at any rate, on some occasion, and carrying with them a Franciscan tone and colour which bear witness to their authenticity.

“We must,” he said, “use great discretion in the treatment which we impose upon our brother, the body, if we do not desire that it should excite in us a tempest of sadness. Let us frankly remove from it every cause of complaint. On this condition, it can accept vigils and lend itself respectfully to our prayers. Otherwise be sure that sooner or later it will say, I am dying of hunger ; your exercises are too much for me. Oh ! if, after it has received its pittance, it murmurs again, then indeed we can remind it that we use the spur with the horse and the goad with the lazy ass.”*

It was at this chapter, probably, that St. Francis announced his intention of a mission to the Soldan in Egypt. No other chapter made such an impression on the Order as this. Indeed, before long anything approaching this “very general chapter,” as it was called,

chapter. But Sabatier’s paper in the *Revue Chrétienne* quoted above shows that the *Fioretti* and the traditional view is not by any means the more improbable.

* *Fioretti*.

became no longer possible, and in the Whitsuntide chapter of 1221 it was determined that henceforth only Provincials should assemble for the general chapter, and that the great body of the brethren should not attempt to attend. Even the Provincials who were at great distances were only to be summoned once in three years, while in the provinces Provincial chapters were to be held at Michaelmas.* So the Franciscan family was growing; so it was taking its form of organisation. But the thing to be noted is how nothing was forced, but the growth was natural and directed by circumstances. Mere *doctrinaires* may frame paper constitutions, which rarely act for any length of time in real life. Masterly geniuses, who are also founders, infuse a spirit and give strength for growth. The society was growing quickly but usefully, and in its temper of love, devotion, and extreme self-sacrifice was still held together in an astonishing manner by the beautiful and powerful spirit of one man.

The most striking development, however, of the movement, the most remarkable evidence of the genius and wisdom of St. Francis, and the most effective instrument for working out a great change for the good of his contemporaries, was St. Francis' creation of the Third Order.

The growth of the brotherhood had been so rapid and so great that it was felt, as we have seen, by the founder that there was need of greater organisation and of the support of a protective authority. The electric effect of his life and preaching and of that of his brothers soon

* For this reason, among others, I am inclined to think that Wadding is right, that the 1219 chapter was "the Chapter of Mats," and the numbers of Franciscans then really as great as has been said. Sabatier, in the paper quoted above, bears out this view.

created a greater difficulty. Men and women from all quarters were so deeply moved that they implored St. Francis's assistance to help them in some way to renounce the world. It is said that probably the first idea of this part of the movement presented itself to his mind when preaching in Canova, a small village not far from Assisi. All classes were then so moved by his words that they implored him—those who were married as well as the single—to help them in some way to join his Order.

Be that as it may, it was at Poggibonsi, near Siena, that he fell in with a man who was exactly suited as a first disciple of the new departure. Lucchese of Caggiano had married young and from sincere affection. The name of his wife was Buonadonna. Lucchese was able and he was ambitious. He became keenly alive to the power that comes from the possession of wealth, and, as he longed for power, wealth he determined to have. His excellent business qualities enabled him to succeed. He carried on a lucrative trade in grain, not apparently being over scrupulous, and making considerable sums of money, by buying up corn and when he had created an artificial demand, re-selling it at an exorbitant price.*

From no external cause, as far as we know, his career of money-getting was checked. He began to think seriously of the meaning of life, of the folly of living for wealth that must perish, and all the time forgetting God. So moved was he by these interior misgivings that he sold much of his property and gave it to the poor, reserving to himself and his wife a modest competence and a humble

* Wadding, *Ann. Min.*, tom. i., anno 1221; Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, 73; *Ibid.* 78; *Acta Sanct.*, tom. ii. 170, 252, &c.; *Tres Socii*, Appendix 60; St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, 24, 46; Suysken, *Acta Sanct.*, *Comment. Prav.*, xx. 453-463.

home. Even this became a rendezvous of the poor, and he gave with such generosity, insisting that no poor man should go from his door empty-handed, that he scarcely left anything for himself.

Then comes one of those beautiful stories, which recur in the Middle Ages, and remind our more faithless times of the work of our Lord and His Apostles. It is said that on one occasion all the bread in the house having been given away, and still more poor folk coming, Buonadonna upbraided her husband for an excessive liberality which looked like sheer folly.

“Where am I to find bread to give them?” she said in bitterness. “O brainless head weakened with fasting!” “In the bin, my Buonadonna,” answered her husband, “be as good in act as you are in name, trust Him who fed the five thousand with five loaves and two small fishes.” Buonadonna obeyed, and sure enough on opening the bin it was full of loaves. Buonadonna henceforth had confidence in God and in her husband, and an unfailing readiness for deeds of charity.*

When St. Francis came preaching at Poggibonsi, Lucchese went to him. St. Francis was not long in perceiving how completely he was of one mind with him, and he explained to him his desire to form an Order in which those who were married might find opportunity for such part of the religious life as might suit their circumstances and duties.

Lucchese and Buonadonna were the first who joined. The design was now publicly avowed in the neighbourhood. Men and women soon came to offer themselves. After assembling them from time to time for long enough to give them the necessary instructions, St. Francis clothed

* *Act. Sanct.*, tom. iii., Apr., p. 600.

them in the grey habit, somewhat similar in form to the Friars Minor, and thus initiated the Third Order, the effects of which were destined to be far reaching and important.*

The idea of this Order was an original idea. Nothing of the kind had ever been created before. This, perhaps, more than any other part of his work, shows St. Francis' extraordinary insight and his statesmanlike qualities. He had the genius to see what was needed for the time. That it was needed is evidenced by its rapid growth, and its real usefulness has been evidenced by its vitality.

The first assembling of the Tertiaries (as they are called) was in the June of 1221. Before the end of that year there were numerous fraternities scattered over central Italy, considerable in numbers, and exercising very important social influence. It is thus that Leo XIII. (himself affiliated to the Franciscan Order) describes their rise : "Greedy of the word preached, the multitudes pressed around them (the Franciscans) ; they wept bitterly for their sins ; they forgot their usual insulting language, and by appeasing discord they returned to sentiments of peace. It is not possible to express the attraction and fascination with which the multitudes pressed to Francis. Great crowds of people came together wherever he came ; often even in small places as well as in populous cities, men of every condition begged him to enroll them under his rule. It was this which led the saint to institute the association of the Third Order."†

That it was a distinct Order, properly so-called, was its peculiarity and its strength. This has been always recognised in the Roman Church. Benedict XIII. in 1725 writes

* Cf. St. Francisci *Opera*, p 38 ; *Regula Frans. de Penitentia*, cap. i.

† Encyclical *In Fest. Sanct. Franc.*, *ut supra.*, p. 33.

of it thus : "We enact and declare that the Third Order has always been, and is, wholly meritorious, and in conformity with Christian perfection, and moreover that it is truly, in the full force of the term, an Order containing in its unity seculars spread throughout the world, since it has its rule approved by the Holy See, its novitiate, its profession, and a habit of a particular form and colour." This Order then was a new departure, and it was of vast influence.

Francis' first thought was indeed for the souls which were perishing in a time when the Church had so forgotten God. This Order went far to revive and support the life of godliness among the mass of the people, and to give them that strength and encouragement in serving God, which depend so much on sympathy and united effort. The rule was simple but practical. It required the banishment of hatred, the cultivation of a loving spirit, the restitution of ill-gotten gain, the profession of the Catholic Faith, and earnest effort to obey God's commandments ; it inculcated the duty of confession and communion three times a year, the wearing of plain garments, and avoidance of worldly assemblies, the keeping of the fast, if possible, in Advent and Lent, and when possible, the recitation of the Divine Office. It was an effort towards unworldliness and piety, which might in some respects be compared to the effort of the Puritans in England or the Piagnoni in Florence centuries after, with this important difference, that there was in it nothing of the hard spirit of these, but it was warmed and illumined by the loving and tender spirit of St. Francis. To a people, like the poorer classes in Italy, ground by feudalism and neglected by a worldly hierarchy and careless priests, it must have been indeed as refreshing

dew "on the thirsty ground," reviving in them the hope and joy of a better world. Besides, by the Order, Francis seemed to be brought more closely in touch with the suffering people. He was the apostle, the friend, the lover, and became the darling of the poor, and now by the creation of this Order into which they flowed with ever-increasing enthusiasm, he seemed more and more one of themselves, and their own possession. He alone of pastors had loved them, and learnt the secret of winning and consoling souls by the influence of a loving charity.

But, in some respects, the most interesting point in relation to the Third Order was this : it gave the death-blow to the feudal system in Italy. St. Francis is sometimes spoken of as a simple man who had no plans, no wide-reaching undertakings. In this there is truth and there is not. It is true that his whole character was one of transparent simplicity. It is true that his strength lay in an entire self-forgetfulness, in taking things as he found them, and lovingly improving them by the application of a tone and temper formed upon a few simple principles. But his very simplicity and unworldliness, with so rich an inheritance of "the wisdom which cometh from above," gave him a marvellous insight into the needs of the time, and the methods most effective for meeting them. In this respect he was, in the highest sense, as is too frequently forgotten, a heaven-born statesman. Had it been otherwise, he never could have carried out the religious and social revolution which, as a matter of fact, was effected by him.

In no way was this revolution more wonderfully brought about than by the creation of the Third Order. His object was to bring peace—the peace of the soul

with God, and the peace of man with man—to a world torn with war and sin. His favourite salutation was “The peace of the Most High be with thee.” How could there be peace in a state of feudalism which turned bishops into warrior barons, and compelled the people to be perpetually fighting in some quarrel between one powerful man or another? How could religion have its due sway if elementary justice was neglected? St. Francis saw this and acted accordingly.

The great revolution sprang from three clauses in the rule. Put shortly they are these: (1) The bearing of arms is forbidden, unless in defence of Church or native country; (2) Oaths are forbidden; and, (3) Collections are to be made among the brethren in aid of the poorer members.*

In accordance with the first of these the Tertiaries refused to follow feudal lords any longer to their endless wars. In accordance with the second they would have no more oaths of fealty. In accordance with the third, they provided for a future when means might be required, and that future came. It was a kind of religious “Trades Union,” to borrow a modern term, as against the oppression of the feudal lords. This was sure soon to be felt, and it was. The struggle began at Faenza. An appeal was made to the Bishop of Rimini, and he referred the case to Rome. Honorius was upon the papal throne, the poor man who loved the poor, who longed for peace, and who had been so moved at Perugia by St. Francis in the matter of the indulgence. Honorius took the side of the Tertiaries, and forbade any to molest them or force a religious Order to break their vows. He even threatened excommunication against those who should attempt to

* *Wadding, Annal. Min.*, anno 1221.

molest them. This is one of those instances in which the papacy in the Middle Ages played a noble part as friends of the weak and protectors of the oppressed.*

The effect of this intervention on the part of the Holy See was incalculable. When men realised that to escape the misery of perpetual military service their course was to enter the Third Order of penance, they hastened to qualify themselves for admission. But the matter went farther. In the March of 1227, Cardinal Ugolino, the protector of the Franciscans, became Pope Gregory IX. There could be little doubt which side he was likely to take in the dispute, and he lost no time in taking his side. He addressed a Bull within three months of his election to the papal throne to the whole Italian Bench, in which he used no measured language as to any who should interfere with the obedience of the Tertiaries to their rule.

What now? Military service was swept away. Feudal oaths were no more, and even the dues and tolls which were all that remained to the feudal lords could be redeemed, and the accumulated collections of the Tertiaries were forthcoming to redeem them. The feudal lords made one more stand. They invented new codes and arrangements whereby to checkmate their opponents. Again an appeal was made to Rome, and again the Pope intervened in behalf of the oppressed. Only two more short papal letters were needed to bring to reason the few lords who were still attempting resistance and then the battle was over. Within three years after his entrance into glory, St. Francis had broken the power of feudalism in Italy. It has been asserted that the Pope was so warm a supporter

* In 1227, Gregory IX. also gave his sanction to a somewhat similar line of action among the Dominicans. *Bullarium Ord. Pred.*, tom. i. p. 24.

of the Tertiaries because he himself, as Cardinal, had drawn up their rule. There is not a shadow of proof of this, although it is possible that St. Francis may have taken counsel with him in the matter. The knowledge he had of the goodness and wisdom of St. Francis, and the excellent influence of the Order is quite sufficient to account for his staunch support of the Tertiaries.* In acting as he did, the Pope had acted wisely besides acting well.

The great struggle between Frederic II. and the Papacy was now setting in, for some years. Frederic II. was a remarkable man. He was in many respects, as is well known, far in advance of his time, but his life was stained with vices and he was profoundly opposed to the Christian faith. This struggle between Frederic and the Pope was a death struggle between a kind of Erastian Paganism and Catholic Christianity. There are few stories more touching in the strange and romantic history of that marvellous century, than the story of the heroic efforts of a mere child, little Rose of Viterbo, to rouse and encourage the Guelphs against the Ghibelline supporters of the unbelieving Emperor. Those who responded most, and who formed the strength of the Guelph opposition, were the Tertiaries. Wide and far the teaching of St. Francis had gone among the people. He had emancipated the middle classes and the poor from feudal tyranny. The Pope had stood by them in this and supported the emancipating rule of St. Francis, and now the Tertiaries stood by the See of Peter in this death struggle with the Empire.†

It has been said, truly enough, that had that struggle come a little sooner, the event might have been very

* Cf. Suysken, *Comment. Prov.*, *Acta Sanct.*, Oct., tom. ii. cap. xx.
p. 463, &c.

† Cf. *Act. Sanct.*, Sept. 4.

different. Had it come when there was a worldly episcopate, a careless priesthood, and a neglected people, when the most earnest were the Cathari and Albigenses and other holders of fantastic heresies, there would have been no force sufficient to turn the scale and defeat so able and inveterate an enemy of Christianity as Frederic. It was very different now. The Christlike spirit of Francis had permeated Italy. A vast body of men and women had been roused in religious activity and awakened to the reality of the Christian life. Even where their convictions may, possibly, not have been deep, nor their practice perfect, they had learnt to feel that the Church was the guardian of their liberties, and that the Papacy was to be protected as the Papacy had stood by them in their critical struggle. It was the Franciscans, and especially the Tertiaries, whom Frederic feared and abhorred more than any other enemy. It was out of the Tertiaries that bodies of militia were formed who opposed him in all parts of Italy, and in his stronghold of Sicily, and it was Franciscan preachers who roused the fears of those who had taken his side as to the spiritual dangers into which they had run accordingly. It was a true insight into the future which taught Innocent III. to recognise that the dream was a real presentiment, and that the tottering Church would be upheld by St. Francis.

Among the members of the Third Order also, as time went on, there were, according to Franciscan traditions, remarkable saints. Lucchese, the first of them, though not formally canonised but only beatified, may well be reckoned among them. His life was consistent and beautiful, and eminently Franciscan in tone and spirit to the end, and he died a beautiful death. His death and that of his wife

took place almost at the same time. He was with her when she received the last Sacraments, with difficulty reached his bed again, and then himself prepared for his end. "I believe," he said, "that not through my merits, but through those of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, I shall escape the snares of the devil." On hearing that Buonadonna was in her last agony, he dragged himself with difficulty to her side to comfort her, and remained till she was gone, and then on being borne back to his bed had but a few minutes to wait in peace and faith, to follow her. It is a touching scene of sweet home love, reminding us, in some measure, of our own John Keble, and showing us how sweet and tender affection and happy Christian homes had been brought back to Italy by St. Francis.

Among the great names claimed by the Tertiaries are those of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, St. Ferdinand of Castile, St. Ivo of Brittany, the great St. Louis, St. Rose of Viterbo, the Blessed Umiliana Cerchi, St. Margaret of Cortona,* the Blessed Angela of Foligno and others. They are of varying interest and varying greatness, but in one thing they are alike—they seem to have drunk in and made their own the spirit of St. Francis. It was that wonderful spirit that came as a new light to men, the spirit of him who seemed

" a wild, childish man,
And could not speak or write, but only loved ;"

the spirit of one who, appearing to possess no great gifts, became so richly endowed with divine wisdom and divine tenderness that self was wholly gone, and only God and man remembered ; the spirit inspired by utter and

* For her most touching story, see Wadding, tom. ii., anno 1277, xiii.

unutterable devotion to the Redeemer, drenched in the thought of the *caritas Dei*, the love of God in coming and living and dying for man, that was the power which turned even over-systematised devotion into living realities, which turned the social system of a century into a help instead of a cruelty to the humble and poor, which conquered baseness and awakened goodness, and comforted the broken-hearted, and brought peace and joy—that marvellous power, the power of a saintly character, wholly surrendered to the love of God and, therefore, to the service of man.

CHAPTER IX

THE NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ST. FRANCIS

THERE is probably no one so removed from us by the distance of centuries of whose character we can form a more just estimate than that of St. Francis of Assisi. We are in possession of so much contemporary information regarding him, that it is possible to realise him in a way not so easy in the case of other men. The mass of poetry and legendary lore which grew up naturally in Italy, and especially in Umbria, about his name, as well as the direct testimony of those who had seen and known him, leave us in little doubt as to what manner of man he was.

And yet, for one reason or another, very false or at least imperfect conceptions have been formed of his character. The methods which he employed for his great work are in so many ways so alien from any that could be effectively employed now, that men are apt to forget the difference of times, and to close their eyes to the wisdom displayed in using just those means which helped towards the end he had in view. He is often thought of as a simple person of a sweet and kindly character, very extravagant, somewhat foolish, often grotesque. Even those who are more thoughtful are inclined to lose sight of many of his richest gifts, and to

picture him as a sweet, sympathetic, childlike almost childish soul, with no aims, and no insight, but certainly doing good because goodness was in him.

Such a picture is entirely insufficient. The work effected by St. Francis was one of the greatest done among men, and in him, as in a *vas electionis*, it had pleased God to store rich gifts to carry out so arduous an undertaking.

There is in every man a natural outfit with which he starts in life. In St. Francis, as we read between the lines of his chroniclers, or meditate on his recorded acts, we notice first, a very striking originality of mind. It is certain that he was in no sense a very learned man, though probably his culture, judging from his knowledge of the *chansons de geste*, in his earlier days, was larger than, in his characteristic self-depreciation, he would be likely to allow. Yet he had a way of penetrating to the heart of a question, and threading his way through many difficulties with the easy grace of one who walks in a breezy morning on an open down, not of the anxious seeker who gropes his way in gloom through a perplexing labyrinth. We notice this originality of mind in the true views he took of real life from the first, in the penetration he showed in realising the actual needs of his time, and the way to meet them, above all in the master stroke of the creation of the Third Order, and thereby, the striking a deathblow to feudal oppression in Italy.

No less conspicuous is that which, probably, men have least credited him with, viz., his extraordinary common sense. He held, as we know, strong and determined views on many points, especially as to poverty. Yet, he was rarely, if ever, unbalanced. Mere exaggeration and eccentricity for its own sake—a mask of shallow and self-

centred minds—was odious to him. This is the more striking because there can be no doubt that he had a sharply sensitive and deeply impulsive nature. It is more easy for men of cold dispositions and restrained vision to be balanced and limited, than for the impulsive and imaginative. Yet in him, with all his vivid imagination and all the impetuosity of his rush of impulse, there was this balanced mind. "In the things of God," says his biographer, "he left empty ornaments, and roundabout methods of speech, and everything belonging to pomp and display to those who are ready to perish."*

Pascal himself or Bishop Butler, with their severe sense of truth, and their deep devotion to strict morality of language, could not have more of the eloquence of limpid sincerity and of the deep truth of things than had this fiery and poetical soul. Devoted as he was to his "Lady Poverty," watchful and on the alert as he was lest anything should creep into the Order to diminish its force, he yet could listen to reason and remonstrance, as in the case of the building erected for the brethren at Bologna, and that built for them at the Portiuncula. He reproved some of the friars for slovenliness and want of personal cleanliness; he encouraged the growth of beautiful flowers in the gardens of Franciscan houses, holding that poverty need not exclude simple beauty. Strong and definite as his convictions were, and determinedly as his line was taken, he was never—like lesser men—a mere slave to a theory. He is a great example of the truth that men guide and influence souls well and wisely, not so much by studying the rules of ascetic theology, as by a simple preaching of the love of God, and common sense.

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*.

And along with this no one can help feeling his thorough frankness. Most men—such is fallen nature—lead a double life. There is the life within, clear to the eye of God, and more or less clear to themselves ; and there is the external life which appears before men. Appearance is one thing, reality is quite another. If there was anything exaggerated about St. Francis, it was his natural and genuine desire not to appear to men other than he was. He had that utter sincerity, that limpid freshness of tone which is one of the most fascinating gifts in a noble character. Here is an example :*

“In the last years of his life,” it is related, “when he was very ill, his guardian, who was also his companion, seeing him in a cold winter with nothing on but one tunic very much patched, had compassion on him. He secretly got a piece of fox skin. ‘My father,’ he said, showing it to him, ‘you suffer from your liver and stomach ; I entreat you, in God’s name, to let me sew this skin under your tunic. If you will not have it all, at least let it cover your stomach.’ Francis did not refuse. ‘I accept what you wish,’ he said, ‘but you must sew as large a piece outside as in.’ The guardian did not see the reason of that. ‘It is quite plain,’ replied Francis ; ‘the outside piece will show the brethren that I allow myself this comfort.’ It is one of many examples of simple frankness and sincerity of his beautiful soul. If truth is, as in fact it is, the basis of any really noble character, that basis was firmly laid in the character of St. Francis.

There was nothing, however, more striking in him and in the spirit which he breathed into men around him, than his “sweet reasonableness,” and ever-springing brightness of mind. He had ever a young heart. If “love,

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*.

joy, peace" are "fruits of the spirit" towards God, the "loving spirit" had indeed given him peace and love, but most abundantly "joy." This supernatural gift was added to a material one. By nature, in God's mercy, he was full of joy. It was the bright side of things on which he looked. He saw indeed clearly enough—none ever saw more clearly—the darkness and horror of sin, and the miseries of the world which had come from man's departure from God. Still there was so much to be thankful for, there was so much in man still to admire, that his life, with all its privations, was one perpetual *Te Deum*. If in the music of modern days, as Spohr touches the secret of tears, and Mendelssohn the secret of gladness, so in the deepest things of God and man, in relation to the world, in the claims and calls and exercises of religion, St. Francis was the apostle of pure joy. He is a remarkable example of the truth that it is to the simple, the straightforward, the pure in heart, that joy comes. How could he fail to be naturally joyous who entered into all bright things and kept himself pure in his early days, and then as time went on, and God touched him, learnt utterly to forget himself, and rejoice in others and in God.

And along with this there was always evident a delicate refinement of nature. There are natures to which "all things are pure." Francis was no recluse who was unacquainted with the evils of the world, but he was clothed in that delicately tempered armour of a natural refinement which enabled him to throw off the evils of life, as though they could not enter into his soul. It was natural, it was inevitable that such a one should be courteous and kindly, even though definite and strong. There are men who, by nature, are adaptable, who naturally are at home in any

situation, and yet without surrender of principle, and Francis was one of them, and being such was sure by his very gifts of nature to fascinate and attract. No one can look at his portrait as painted by Fra Bartolommeo, or at several of the portraits from the brush of Cigoli, without seeing that those great masters have caught this special characteristic, this sweetness and brightness, this refinement of nature and fascination of joy. "His exquisite sweetness," says St. Bonaventura, "his perfect manner, his bright temper, his incomparable affability, his generosity which gave without counting the cost, all was a revelation of a happy, natural disposition, and the prelude to the blessings in store for him." *

His childlike delight in things was always simple and natural. He was always fond of French, the tongue of his mother's land, and of the power of song, then so abundant in Southern France. He at times sang canticles in French and accompanied himself on a sort of improvised violin, and passed from that to rapturous thoughts of God. "I have witnessed all that," is the testimony of his contemporary and biographer.† There is no doubt that much of his extraordinary power over men came from this bright temperament and his unflagging courtesy. He never denounced men, he never abused them, he never lost his temper with them. If they were angry with him, he felt, with sincerity, that part at least of the fault must be his. He won his way by his unfailing sweetness, combined with his lion-like strength. He could not endure a sour or puritanical religion. It savoured to him of darkness, and he was always "walking in the light." "My brother," he said to one of the brethren who appeared with a sad

* St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. vi., and all his biographers.

† Thomas of Celano

countenance, "if thou hast some fault to mourn over, do it in thy cell ; groan and weep before thy God, but here, with thy brethren, be as they are in tone and countenance." It was striking and powerful the way in which he infused this into the Order. It is said that in the Life of St. Margaret of Cortona, God is rarely spoken of as "the Almighty" or "the Most High," but constantly as "the Lord of all courtesy," "the very courteous Lord." *

It need hardly be added that St. Francis possessed an iron will and an indomitable courage. This is evident from first to last. The mysteries of heredity we do not fully understand, even in our own days of scientific enlightenment, but we can see that God, in His supreme wisdom, prepares the great instruments by which He works for men. If they are faithful, He gives them further endowments. Such in his original gifts, such in his faithful use of them, such in his later endowments, was St. Francis of Assisi.

It is not to be supposed, indeed, that St. Francis had not his share of temptations ; on the contrary, nobly gifted natures like his have a share unusually large, but part of the beauty of his character was due to the faithful way in which, with his usual intrepidity and his constant cheerfulness—that great power against temptation—he fought and conquered them.

Of this we have abundant evidence. In such a nature there was sure to be a fund of sympathy with the external world. And such there was.

Nothing in relation to St. Francis has struck his contemporaries, nor others since, more than his intense love of Nature. In this way his spirit is essentially modern. It is curious that in the ancient world there was none of that

* *Acta Sanct.*, tom iii. February.

romantic love of nature which is so marked a characteristic in modern literature.* In Holy Scripture itself nature is indeed alluded to, and in some very touching ways, but it is almost always in illustration of the greatness and power of God in some phase of the life of man. In the apostolic writings Nature almost disappears, and it is a remarkable thing that St. Paul, with all his width of sympathy, and in constant view, in the course of his wanderings, of some of the fairest scenes of natural beauty, seems never to have been touched by the loveliness of even the most fascinating landscapes. Nothing can surpass the natural glories of Damascus, of Athens, of the mountains of Thessaly, of the Gulf of Corinth, nor yet the seas and skies of Italy and Sicily, but as far as we know, the great Apostle, absorbed in his mighty mission, was blind to them all.

Not so St. Francis. In this respect he had caught the very spirit of Him who called men's attention to the ravens circling to their rest and the lilies in their beauty closing to their sleep.

From the very first, the highly sensitive nature of St. Francis was intensely alive to the beauty of Nature. Sea and sky, rain and wind, sun, moon and stars, the flowers, the birds, the beasts, the rushing water, the limpid streams, the rocks and pine woods, and chestnut and olive groves of Umbria, the sparkling spring flowers of Italy, and the glorious colours of the vintage, all thrilled him through and through with a sense of never ending pleasure.†

Like everything else, he took this natural delight up into the region of his fervent religion. He was deeply impressed with the loving Fatherhood of God, and

* But see, *per contra*, an interesting article in *Bits about Books*, by William Canton, in *Good Words*, April 1897.

† St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. viii. &c.

drenched with the thought of His penetrating care. All things that came from God were dear to him. His simple, childlike nature fastened on the thought that if all from one Father then all of real kin. "Our brother" and "our sister," as applied to all sorts of natural objects, were constant and serious epithets on his lips. "Our brother the fire and brother the sun," "our sister the water," "our little sisters, the larks," "our little brothers, the lambs"—such phrases were constantly used by him. Many and beautiful are the stories told of him in his intercourse with living creatures. Some of these are legendary, as in the "Fioretti," some are vouched for by eye-witnesses, but whether literally true, or evidently imaginary or metaphorical, they all witness to the same facts—the sweet and simple character of St. Francis and his deep sympathy with Nature. This sympathy in itself speaks volumes for the purity and beauty of a soul. It is only the pure in heart who see God, and it is the radiant and childlike mind which enters with joy into the beauty of that creation wherein "God has declared His power and glory."

Even those acts of St. Francis towards living creatures, of which we have substantial evidence, are not necessarily miraculous, though as such they may have been accepted at the time. We have all known some who have had the gift of peculiar influence with the animal creation, arising often from a simple character, careful study of the ways of the creatures, and a sympathetic love for them.

This gift Francis certainly possessed. He, brave as he was and prepared to endure any trial, could not bear to see the dumb creatures in pain. To avoid giving them pain, and to aid them in their distress, he conceived to be duties. This is all the more striking as, ordinarily speak-

ing, the Latin nations are not nearly so tender-hearted towards their creatures as the Northern peoples: and even the Roman Church seems usually to encourage sympathy with the lower creation less than other parts of Christendom. The Franciscan spirit, however, is eminently strong in the department of sympathy. One can imagine what real pain St. Francis would have suffered had he lived to the age when vivisection has become a regular method of scientific investigation. There can be no doubt that as cruelty hardens and debases the nature, so sympathy with the joys and sorrows, and recognition of the rights, of the creatures are marks of characters of gentleness, tenderness, and courage.*

It is startling to find in a life of such constant labour as his, and in a spirit so absorbed in heavenly things and in the destiny of man, how he always found time for the creatures. He loved to see them, any and all, and never thought any too uninteresting for his attention. He made friends of them, and took a positive pride in any traits of goodness which he noticed in them. He seemed to have crossed the impossible chasm which yawns in mystery between two different natures; and, indeed, everything seemed to be to him a companion and a friend. He had a special interest in bees and a special tenderness towards lambs, as being a symbol of our Blessed Lord in His meekness and patience; and as for flowers, he could not see them in their abundant beauty without bursting into praise to God, and calling upon

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, cap. vii., 58, 59. The anecdote of the birds at Bevagna, St. Francis, with all his reserve, loved to tell; *ut dicebat* is the expression of his chronicler St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. viii. 109, 174, 175. *Fioretti*, 16. Cf. also *The Imitation of Christ*, lib. ii. 4: "Si rectum esset cor, tuum tibi omnis creatura speculum vitæ, et liber sanctæ doctrine esset."

them in his simple, loving way to join with him in his praises.*

There is a pretty story—one out of an almost infinite number—told of him which illustrates this. As he journeyed once to Siena he met a lad carrying some turtle-doves which he had caught, and which he was intending to sell. “O good young man,” he said to him at once, “these are innocent birds which are compared in Holy Scripture to chaste and faithful souls. I pray you not to give them over to those who will kill them, but give them to me.” The young man assented, and when they were given to him St. Francis placed them in his bosom, saying: O my little sisters, the turtle-doves, so simple, innocent, and chaste, why did you let yourselves be taken? Now I will save you from death and make nests for you that you may bring up your young and multiply according to the commandment of our Creator.” And the saint kept his word and gave a home to the little strangers, who, laying their eggs and bringing up their young, dwelt with the brethren, and refused to leave them until St. Francis gave them his benediction and bade them depart.†

These sweet and simple stories might be multiplied to any extent. If in some measure legendary, at least they witness to a real characteristic of the man, and to what was felt about him by his contemporaries and the Italian people. Towards the close of his life he wrote his celebrated “Canticle of the Sun,” or “The Song of the Creatures.” Of this his biographer says that he was of the race of Ananias, Azarias, and Misael; bringing all

* Thomas of Celano, cap. ix. 77, &c.

† *Fioretti*, 22. It is an instance also of his large and just ideas of chastity: see above, pp. 121-122.

creation with him to glorify God. And speaking of the "Canticle," a gifted French critic has said: "In it we feel the breath of that Umbrian terrestial paradise where the sky is so brilliant and the earth so laden with flowers."* The Canticle was as follows:

(1) Most high, omnipotent, and good Lord, Thine are praise, glory, honour, and every benediction, to Thee alone they are due, and no man is worthy to name Thee.

(2) Praised be God, the Lord, with all Thy creatures, eternally. Our noble brother, the sun, who makes the day and illuminates us with his light. He is beautiful and radiant with great splendour.

He bears Thy sign, O Lord.

(3) Praised be my Lord for our sister the moon and for the stars. Thou hast made them clear and beautiful in Heaven.

(4) Praised be my Lord for our brother the wind, and for the air, for cloudy, and for serene, and for all weather, by which Thou givest sustenance to Thy creatures.

(5) Praised be my Lord for our sister the water, who is so useful, humble, chaste, and precious.

(6) Praised be my Lord for our brother the fire, by whom Thou dost illuminate the night, and he is beautiful, joyous, very vigorous, and strong.

(7) Praised be my Lord for our mother the earth, who nourishes and governs us, and produces diverse fruits and coloured flowers and herbs.

(8) Praised be my Lord for those who pardon for Thy love, and bear tribulations and infirmities.

Blessed are those who endure in peace, for they shall be crowned by Thee the Most High.

(9) Praised be my Lord for our sister the death of the body, from which no man living can escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin; blessed are those who are found according to Thy holy will, for the second death cannot hurt them.

(10) Praise, bless, and thank my Lord, and serve Him with great humility.†

* Ozanam, *Les Poëtes Franciscains*, p. 86.

† Wadding, *Ann. Min.*, tom. i. anno 1224. Ozanam, *Les Poëtes Franciscains*, p. 82. The orginal text is in the *Liber Conformatum* of Barthelemy of Pisa, par. 2, ii. M. Renan, with his characteristic inaccuracy, asserts that

It is said that the interruption in the subject at strophe eight arose in the following way. There had been a quarrel between the bishop and the magistrate of Assisi. Francis sent the brethren to sing, "the Song of the Creatures," with the inserted verse. The effect was as he desired, and the quarrel was healed. The verse on Death commemorates his own feelings on its near approach and his temporary recovery. It is a very early effort at poetry struggling into existence, but it is a remarkable exhibition of that sweet Franciscan spirit which saw in all created things a reason for praising God. To illustrate this further would be to transcribe a large number of the "Fioretti," and to quote the constantly recurring testimony of the biographers of the great saint.*

Still more complete and wonderful was his love for his fellow creatures, and his entire devotion to them. In each one with whom he had to do, he saw a possible Christ. Here was one for whom Christ died ; here was one to help whom was to follow Christ's example ; here was one whose soul might become more and more the habitation and reflection of the beauty of Christ. Christ had "given himself for men, and Francis would not stop short of His example. He utterly gave himself for others." He kept back nothing, and his love was wide and generous. There was nothing narrow or pedantic about it. Anything that interested his fellow men interested him, his country, the aspirations of the people, their struggle for freedom, literature, song—all moved his

we do not possess the original, but have only an Italian text translated from the Portuguese which again was translated from the Spanish. *That* we have, but also the original : see Sabatier, *Vis de S. F. d'Assise*, pp. xxxiv. and chap. xviii. *passim*.

* Cf. Ozanam, *Les Poëtes Franciscains*, pp. 83, 84, *Analicta Franciscana*, cap. ii. 38, 39.

ever ready sympathy. He might have said with unerring accuracy, "Homo sum; humani nihil a me alienum puto."

It was the same with his tender solicitude for those in suffering and sorrow. His followers who believed in his miracles, and record them, saw in them the direct following of his Master. They were believed to be chiefly wrought for the suffering. Consequently he possessed the power of winning men in the largest degree. He could not force or compel, he could fascinate and win. He knew how to be "all things to all men," like St. Paul, and rather to dwell upon points of agreement than upon points of divergence.

This was especially evidenced in the way in which he drew and held the brethren of the Order. The numbers who joined were immense, and before his death he had the sorrow of experiencing some foretaste of troubles which were to come upon his community after he was gone.

Still, it is marvellous how well he kept together a young community of such rapid growth and vast extent, with a rule only partially formed, by little else than his own extraordinary personal loving influence. He did manage to infuse into the Order a large measure of his own self-sacrificing spirit. He taught them above all things to help one another, "each to esteem other better than himself." Half the sorrows in the world come from self-seeking. Francis had his heel firmly on self,* and he spread very widely the same loving spirit among his brethren. It was done chiefly by prayer, by self-sacrifice, and by ready sympathy. He was ever the servant of each and all, and it is marvellous how in his constant

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, cap. vii. 53, 54

labours, he found time to help his brethren in their special needs. He could be stern with the sinful ; he set his face against idleness, and slander, and bad example. His words to his brethren on these subjects are strong and stern, but loving influence was more his method, and he exerted himself with great gentleness but entire distinctness to restrain the somewhat severe and over-bearing temper of Brother Elias, when Vicar-General of the Order.

It was the poor, however, who especially moved the heart of Francis. In every really poor man he saw an image of Christ. We, in the sad experience of modern times, cannot help thinking that he must often have been taken in. Very possibly he was, but things were very different then, and he seems fully to have realised just what was needed then. To the sick and afflicted he was tender as a mother, to those who needed guidance and support he was ever a guide and stay.

The examples of his loving wisdom which are, perhaps, most striking are his treatment of Brother Leo and Brother Egidio. The former was very dear to him among his early disciples, for his simplicity and gentleness. Francis called him "God's little lamb." He was good and gentle, but at times troubled and almost paralysed in action by scrupulosity. In one of his states of trouble, Francis wrote to him as follows :

" Brother Leo, thy brother Francis gives thee salutation and peace. I call thee my son, as a mother, and all we have said in walking together I condense in this word and counsel. In whatsoever manner thou canst please the Lord God, and follow in His footsteps and His poverty, do it with the blessing of the Lord God and in obedience to me. And if it be necessary to thee for thy

soul, or any other consolation to thee, and thou desire to come to me, my Leo, come. Farewell in Christ."* Here is an example of loving wisdom and common sense, helping to deliver an over-scrupulous soul. It has been well said of this letter : "What a sweet application of the saying, 'Love God, and [then] do what you please.'"[†]

The other remarkable example is his treatment of Brother Egidio. He was bold, adventurous, daring, brave. To coop him up on one spot would have been to waste his energies and endanger his persevering in his vocation. St. Francis knew his man, he knew his goodness and devotion, and ready ear to the calls of God, and he boldly allowed him to lead the life of a knight-errant and did not keep him attached to any one Franciscan settlement. In the event, Francis' judgment proved itself true. To the end Egidio was an ornament to the Order, and his work of the highest usefulness, and his goodness was recognised so much that he was "beatified" by the Church.

But indeed the best proof of his love for others was to be found in the devotion to him wide and far in Italy. He who shunned honour, and had given up all things became the power and the idol and darling of his age. By the poor he was more especially idolised. They looked upon him, and justly, as their apostle.

Great men, however, do not always seem at their best in the eyes of those who are placed most near to them. It was not so with him. His biographers who place us fully and simply in possession of his beauty of character were men who knew him intimately, and had every

* Wadding, *Epist. xvi.*, from the original MS. preserved at Spoleto. *Analecta Franciscana*, cap. i. 26. *Acta Sanctorum*, tom. ii. October.

† Léon Le Monnier, *Vie de S. F. d'Assise*, chap. xix.

opportunity of studying him closely, and they were the men who were most deeply impressed with his wonderful love and his entire self-sacrifice.

The love of Francis for all his fellow creatures was of that exalted kind which springs from real truth, from a true sense of man's relation to God, and his immense value measured by the price that was paid for his redemption; and it was that specially Christ-like love which spends itself upon objects having no special attraction, no special claim. It was this that marked Francis more than anything else, perhaps, as a true saint. In this connection, and in illustration, it is not amiss to quote some eloquent words :

“ How, according to St. John, may ‘ we Christians know that we have passed from death unto life ’ ? The Alpine climber, who has no instrument at hand by which to ascertain his exact elevation, yet can observe that the vegetation has altered its character, or that it is disappearing, or that the air he breathes is sensibly more rare and more exhilarating, or that the line of snow is just above him. The traveller who crosses by night the frontier which divides two empires, unable to detect the exact line of the boundary, yet can note the change of language, the change of uniform, the altered character of the general culture, and deportment, and civilisation of the people. The moral world, too, has its indistinct frontier lines, and yet also its broad distinctions, which prove that the frontiers are real. How, then, can we know that we are on the mountain side with a heavenly guide, high above the mists of the vale of selfishness ? How can we be sure that the spiritual frontier has been really passed, which separates the kingdom of the living from the realm of death ? St. John replies, ‘ Because we love the brethren.’ Spiritual privileges, a confident temper, worldly prosperity, or intellectual movement, do not prove what is proved by the presence of love. For ‘ God is Love, and he that dwelleth in Love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.’ When we feel our heart beat

with these divine pulsations of a higher life, we know that we have passed the Rubicon, and that we are in our true country. For beyond the frontier of the Incarnation there is no such thing as this new love of the brethren. New as it was, that commandment was obeyed. Jesus Christ shone in His perfection on the human heart, and like the closed bud, it opened at the bidding of the shining sun. In loving our blessed Saviour, men were trained to the love of God; in learning to love the unseen and incomprehensible God, the heart opened sufficiently to love the human brotherhood. To the Christian every human being became an object of interest and of affection. The love of the Christian was to follow in the track of the love which had created and redeemed the world. Had not God made each separate human life? Had not Jesus Christ died for each separate human life? Then surely each human life must be full of dignity and of mystery. Just as the botanist finds interest in that which to others is but as a worthless weed, so beneath the shadow of the Cross, the Christian sees in every human being a mind that can know the very and eternal truth—a heart that can make answer to the heart of God—a vast, unexplored, inner world of thought, feeling, resolve, desire, hope, grief, anguish, passion. To the Christian every separate life is seen to be no mere specimen of a class; for has it not its own special work? Does it not, like a meteor across the heavens, pursue its own path in time—a path which none other can share—a path which has its own length, its own brightness, its own darkness, its own end? Is not every living man in one of two states, and has he not one of two eternal destinies before him, and is there not some one special work which he alone was meant to do? Who can refuse interest to human life when in the school of Jesus Christ he has learnt its value? And yet this interest may be merely speculative; it is not necessarily love. But then, in every soul the Christian beholds the image of the great object of his true affection; every soul speaks to him of the handiwork of the Creator, and of the tears and blood of the Redeemer, and of the toil and breath of the sanctifier. The love of God lavished in profusion upon the unthankful and the evil obliges the Christian not merely to love his Christian brother, but to love his

brother man as man. It was wonderful that first awakening of this perception in the human heart at our blessed Saviour's bidding. That primitive love had all the charm of a newly discovered accomplishment, unknown to previous generations ; and it was practised by the missionaries and martyrs of early Christendom as if with the buoyant delight that is moved by recent discovery. It was like a new sense developed from within, opening indeed upon familiar objects, but perceiving in them a revelation of unsuspected beauty ; it had all that keenness of appetite and fresh vigour of appreciation which no impaired health or spirits had as yet blunted or enfeebled. Here was a heaven-sent faculty capable of breasting the devastating forces of selfishness, and of renewing the face of the earth. Human thought had dared to dream of a love that should be absolutely humanitarian, that should be bounded only by the limits of the race ; and lo ! Christ our Lord had realised it !”*

We could not better express the power and conduct of St. Francis. The thirteenth century was in some senses like the first century. A half-dead Christendom weary of its sin and misery was waiting for an awakening, and he came—this remarkable man—and roused it, for there had come to him, with “all the charm of a newly discovered accomplishment,” the power and duty of loving mankind for the love of Christ.

“For the love of Christ !” There can be no doubt that all the vast charity and deep self-sacrifice of Francis rested really upon his love of God. St. Bonaventura, in writing of it, writes of a deep mystery, and stands before it astonished and perplexed. God in His mysterious providence had made this soul ready to respond to His touches of tenderness. “His heart,” says his chief biographer, “was a perfect instrument ; as soon as the words ‘love of God’ touched it, as a violin responds to

* Liddon, *Sermons preached on Special Occasions*, Sermon iv. pp. 60, 61.

the bow, every chord within it vibrated, and gave forth powerful and harmonious tones.”*

Scripture has taught us that the blessing of a pure heart is, it sees God. It was this purity of heart and simplicity of purpose that brought St. Francis so close to the divine light. “His spirit,” says the same chronicler, “victorious over the world and passion, had a wide flight. By right of a pure heart he entered the bosom of eternal light. There at the source of truth, from the word of God Himself, he drank in the words that afterwards resounded with such sweetness from his lips.”†

This was the secret of Francis’ wonderful balance of mind and unflagging joy. Nothing could darken that light; nothing empty his soul of satisfaction. What was the world to him but an opportunity to serve and love Him who was the centre of his life and the joy of his heart. Such is the blessedness of the saints. The expressions with regard to his entire absorption in God’s presence at times used by his biographers are often too sacred for our ordinary reading. Suffice it to say, that he impressed his contemporaries not only with his sweetness and balance of mind, and brightness and wisdom towards all around him: not only with his intense activity of mind and body in constant toil, but also with the spring of all this being a constant, a sustained communion with God which supported him in self-sacrifice and brought him never-ending joy.

The love of God has, so the Church and the Bible remind us, been revealed to His creatures “in the face of Jesus Christ.”‡ We know, in the recorded life of our Master the mind and character of the unseen God.§ The

* St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. ix. 1.

† *Ibid.*

‡ 2 Cor. iv. 6.

§ St. John, xiv. 9.

Incarnation has brought God near to His creatures, first in the person of our Master as He appeared in His earthly life, and then in His constant presence in His Church, and, above all, in the most Holy Sacrament of the altar. St. Francis had, through devotion, and faithfulness, and purity of heart, realised in a very high degree the love of God in Christ. Like St. Paul, more than perhaps any other man, to him "to live was Christ, and to die was gain." His biographer, who knew him well, says of him : "Jesus was all things to him. Jesus was in his heart ; Jesus was on his lips ; Jesus was in his eyes, in his ears, in his hands. He was in his whole being."

It is true. It is the secret of his marvellous influence, because of his bright and self-forgetting character. He had, consequently, a deep and filial love for the mother of our Redeemer, for the saints and the holy angels—the fruits and ministers of the Incarnation. He had a special love to the festival of Christmas, and wished characteristically that corn could be spread along the roads on that day, so that the birds, "especially our brothers, the larks," might enter into Christmas joy.*

But his chief devotion was the crucifix. Into few, if any, souls has so deeply entered the full meaning of that awful act and that sacred sorrow. He was moved to the very depth of his being by the unimagined sufferings of the Son of God, and the result was not sentiment or contemplation merely, or dream, but the practical, sustained, and self-sacrificing effort to bring home to the hearts of men the seriousness of sin and the love of God which alone explain that tremendous mystery.

This was the spring of St. Francis' power, this the root of his greatness. To lose himself for others and for God,

* Cf. Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, cap. x. 85, 86, 87.

to live the Christ-like life, and to persuade men of its joy and blessedness, to be an *alter Christus*, another Christ, for love of Him who died to save him ; this was his one ambition, and by this he revolutionised his century, and saved the Church.

Such were some features, natural and supernatural, in the character of St. Francis. A question remains, however, of considerable interest in this connection. How far may we go in belief of the record of his alleged miracles ? And especially what are we to think of the vexed question of the "stigmata ?"

(1) With regard to the first of these questions, no believer in the Christian revelation can seriously doubt the possibility of miracles. Every Christian believes that, upon such occasions and for such causes as may seem good to Him, God can, what is called, "vary the course of Nature," and manifest His power in some special way to the eyes of His creatures. Whether this is by permitting the operation of some higher "law," as it is not unusual now to suppose, or whether it is by suspending and innovating upon "law" altogether, we need not discuss here. "Law," after all, is not a tangible thing ; it is a handy expression for the observed uniformity of the course of Nature, and that is all. "Law," in any serious sense which can be admitted by a believer, implies a "law-giver," and if a supreme law-giver and ruler, we must believe that He is master of His own world, and that He has the power to vary His methods if need be, or in other words to work what is called "a miracle."

All Christians believe in the truth of the miracles recorded in the New Testament, and there is no valid reason to suppose that such "interpositions"—if so they

are to be called—of God should necessarily cease with the death of St. John, or in fact that a line should be drawn by God at apostolic times. Such a supposition is improbable, and indeed would appear dishonouring to God.

The whole question as to "ecclesiastical miracles," as they are called, is not as to their possibility, or even their probability, for both must be granted by a believer in the Christian revelation, but as to the evidence on which they rest. There are "ecclesiastical miracles" about which there can be probably no doubt whatever in the minds of Christians, such as those recorded by St. Augustine in Milan and others,* the evidence for which is as strong as for anything ordinarily believed in history. The whole question, in fact, is a question of evidence.

The Roman part of the Catholic Church accepts a very large number of miracles simply from the sanction of the Papal See. To other parts of the Catholic Church, such as the Eastern and the Anglican, this testimony, though weighty, is, of course, not conclusive, (1) because they cannot admit (as it is entirely unhistorical) the exaggerated claims of that see to decide this and other questions; and (2) because, on that authority, a number of miracles have been from time to time admitted, which are either wanting in sufficient and satisfactory evidence, or even altogether and evidently without foundation.

As to the miracles of St. Francis, generally speaking, there is in them no intrinsic improbability. His holy life, his constant communion with God, the abundant blessings with which it pleased God to mark his ministry, all point in the same direction. Some of the miracles recorded are clearly legendary, but some—as for instance

* Cf. *Essay on Miracles*, J. H. Newman, *passim*, especially section viii.

the curing of the cripple boy at Tuscanella and other similar acts—come to us on the highest authority, and are so in conformity to the miracles of our Saviour that we may well be inclined to accept them as carrying with them a high probability.*

(2) As to the “stigmata,” the question is one of the greatest interest. In the first place, the story is as follows :

In 1224, St. Francis had despatched the first Franciscan mission to England—a mission destined to be the beginning of one of the strongest and most useful branches of the Order—that which took root, and left behind it such marvellous fruit in this country.

After the despatch of this mission St. Francis returned to Assisi. He was preaching at and near Foligno accompanied by Brother Elias, then Vicar-General, when, it is said, Elias was warned in a dream to tell him of his approaching death. On receiving this warning, he resolved to retire once more to La Vernia, where some years before he had had a time of rest, in order to prepare quietly for his end. Four of the brethren accompanied him. The biographer does not mention them by name, but he describes them sufficiently for purposes of identification, and they are known thus to be the Brothers Masseo, Rufino, Angelo Tancredi, and Leo.†

After leaving Assisi before the Festival of the Assumption, they proceeded to La Vernia. St. Francis soon after betook himself to retirement and solitary prayer. He desired, it is said, to learn from God the way in which He would have him spend such time as was still allowed to him in

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, cap. viii. 65. St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. xii. 180.

† Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, lib. ii. cap. 91.

this world. He believed that it was revealed to him that he would have to bear considerable suffering. He was anxious to learn God's will more fully. Entering the little chapel in company with one of the brethren, he three times opened the Book of the Gospels, asking for guidance, and each time his eye fell upon the account of the Passion of our Lord. It is said that this gave him unspeakable joy as he believed that he was to enter into glory by some form of martyrdom, and by some close conformity to the sufferings of our Redeemer.*

Shortly after, St. Francis is said to have been withdrawn to a distance in prayer. He saw, so the story goes, a brilliant light, and soon was conscious, above him, of the presence of a seraph with six wings ; "with twain he covered his feet, with twain his head, and with twain he did fly." As he hovered above St. Francis, he became conscious that the seraph bore apparently the crucified Lord, who contemplated His servant with a look of love. Standing on his feet and gazing in wonder, he believed that it was conveyed to him that the vision indicated (1) that he should suffer a form of spiritual martyrdom, (2) that in his body he should have the sufferings of the Cross ; in his soul the burning love of the seraph. When the vision faded away, he had clearer spiritual light and warmth in his soul, and on his body the five wounds of the Passion. At first he feared to tell the brethren, but when called to him, and when he spoke in a vague and general way, one of the brethren asked for an explanation, and then St. Francis told them all, refusing, however, to repeat the mysterious words spoken by the seraph. Such is the story as told by St. Bonaventura. He spoke

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, lib. ii. cap. i. 91-94 ; St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, 189, 190.

little of it, and tried to conceal the "stigmata" at first. After a little he allowed some of the brethren to see them. Not until his death was the matter generally known, but then more than 700 persons are said to have seen the sacred scars on his body.*

The fact of the "stigmata" undoubtedly rests on contemporary testimony. The three early biographers give a circumstantial account. They write of it with the precision of eye-witnesses. At the General Chapter at Genoa one of the companions of Francis in answer to the demand of the general John of Parma to say what he knew of the subject said, "These sinful eyes have seen them, these sinful hands have touched them."†

M. Renan, of course, following Karl Hase, has denied the fact on the ground that it was not spoken of before St. Francis' death. This appears to be inaccurate. It appears to have been known to the brethren, and certainly spoken of openly on the day of his death. The biographer who tells us of him most was present at his death and saw the "stigmata."

It is not necessary to believe in every detail of the story of the seraph. That may have been a vision or imagination, but it can hardly be doubted that the body bore the signs of the Passion. Indeed, physically, it is not improbable that such deep and constant concentration of mind on the subject of the Lord's sufferings may have had an effect upon the body; such cases have since been known. Whether or not the "stigmata" were actually on the body of the saint, the idea represented by the belief is a true one that he "bore in his body the marks

* Cf. Wadding *Ann. Min.*, tom. ii. anno 1255.

† Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, 94, 95; St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, 191-193; *Tras Socii*, *Vita*, cap. v. 69, 70; Cf. Suysken *Comment. Prov.*, *Acta Sanct.*, tom. ii. Oct. xxiv. 546, 547, &c. But see Appendix "On the Stigmata."

(stigmata) of the Lord Jesus."* The conformity of St. Francis to his Master in self-surrender, suffering, and self-sacrifice was very perfect indeed. However the story may have been embellished by imaginary details, on the whole the weight of testimony is in favour of belief in the fact. The following ode of early Franciscan origin connects itself with the devotion of the saint to our Lord, and describes in mystical language the tumult of a soul overcome with the love of Christ. Ozanam seems to be of opinion that it was written by St. Francis in his tumult of soul after receiving the "stigmata," and that it has been retouched by a disciple. It is in all the quaint style and imagery of the poems of the time.

"Love has cast me in a fire.

He my new spouse what time the loving lamb gave me the ring; he threw me into prison then, and with a knife he wounded me. My heart he severed.

"Love has cast me in a fire.

He cut my heart in two, and my body fell to earth; the bolt from Love's cross-bow struck me with fire. He made war of peace. I die of sweetness.

"Love hast cast me in a fire.

Marvel not that I die of sweetness; such blows he gave me with lances of love, for the blade is long and broad—one hundred cubits—you must know; it pierced me through and through.

"Love has cast me in a fire.

Then the lances were thick and the bolts flew fast. Then did I take a shield and still the blows came thicker; they broke me down, and no defence I had; he sent them with such force.

"Love has cast me in a fire.

He sent them with such force that I despaired of warding them off, so to escape from both I cried with all my strength: the war thou wagest is unequal, but he set up a new engine that gave me other blows.

“Love has cast me in a fire.

The missiles were such heavy stones that each one weighed a thousand pounds; they fell so thick and fast that I could not count them, not one but hit the mark.

“Love has cast me in a fire.

He never could have missed me, so well he aimed. Prone on the ground I lay, nor could I help myself. All broken as I was, like a dead man, no consciousness I had.

“Love has cast me in a fire.

Translated not by death, but by excess of joy, my heart within became so strong that I revived and followed those saints who led me to the supernal court.

“Love has cast me in a fire.

Then when my strength returned, I made war on Christ. Soon I was armed and rode upon His country. I met Him and encountered Him, and took revenge on Him.

“Love has cast me in a fire.

Then, after my revenge, I made my peace with Him, because His love had been the first, the truest love. Now am I of Christ enamoured wholly, of Him whom I have ever borne within my heart. Love has cast me in a fire. Love has cast me in a fire.”

Here, undoubtedly, is a good example of the strange, mystical, Franciscan poem of the time. Here, in an allegory, the poet shows the tumult of a mystical mind carried captive at last by divine love.*

“This work,” says Ozanam, “divided into ten strophes of seven lines each, of very simple construction, with a regular number of syllables, and mostly correct rhymes, shows the trace of a skilful hand, perhaps that of a disciple charged with retouching the Master’s inspiration. But, all the same, we find in it the boldness of the genius of St. Francis, the precision of his language, and, in short, the whole impression of a great event that had set its miraculous seal upon his person.”†

* Ozanam *Les Poètes Franciscains*, p. 87.

† *Ibid.* 86 and 87. The poem is preserved in St. Bernardine, *op.*, tom. iv. sermon 4, quoted by Wadding.

Whether then or not the "stigmata" was a literal fact; whether or not intense contemplation of an intense mind had affected the body; whether or not there were miraculous forces at play in the matter; one thing is certain—in some form or other it was believed by his contemporary biographers, it has been looked upon as a true tradition in the Order, and it certainly represents at least the strong conviction of the intense love of St. Francis to the person and Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

La Vernia of course became sacred ground. In 1260 it was solemnly blessed by the ecclesiastical authorities with a vast multitude of people assenting, and was called "the Seraphic Mountain."* "Seraphic" became a favourite Franciscan phrase. St. Bonaventura was called "the Seraphic Doctor." He wrote a treatise on "the six wings of the seraphim," on the very spot. Men may, in too simple faith, in an uncritical age, have accepted literally every detail of the story of the "stigmata," but one thing all felt which was a real truth, without possibility of contradiction, that the prevailing motive in St. Francis' life, and in his death, the prevailing tone which he desired to bequeath to his brethren for ever was a burning love of God as revealed by Christ Jesus, and from this an intrepid devotion to the service of man.

* Cf. Wadding, *Ann. Min.*, tom. ii. anno 1255, x. xi., and *ibid.* anno 1260, L-liii.

CHAPTER X

THE CLOSING DAYS OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

WHETHER or not men admire the special line in life taken by St. Francis, whether they look upon him as a wise and forcible character, or as a more or less useful, but somewhat overstrained enthusiast—all must recognise his as a remarkable life.

He had about him all the *élan* and dash and thoroughness of enthusiasm, which are apt to be special subjects of suspicion to the modern English mind. He had none of that supreme caution and “prudence,” which sometimes appear to be the only virtues valued in high ecclesiastical quarters in later days ; and yet contrary to all that the “modern” (that is, wisely self-seeking) mind of our times would expect, there was a “method in his madness ;” he was curiously like the Lord Jesus Christ, not as He is conceived to suit the taste of a highly cultivated, and enthusiastically worldly age, but as He was according to the testimony of contemporaries and eye-witnesses, as recorded in the pages of the New Testament.

“Folly” and “grotesque enthusiasm”—those are the descriptive sketches often given of his characteristics—ought not, according to all true calculations of this century, to have been of any real power. They ought—by all good rights—to have shocked the calm and balanced views of

temperate men. They were not the modes of thought and action which would commend themselves to the average ecclesiastic, then as now; on the contrary they would be perplexing and annoying and confusing to such right-minded dignitaries—and yet, somehow, St. Francis did a unique work. He revolutionised his age; he saved Western Christianity; he impressed his contemporaries in a way, seldom, if ever, done before or since, by the simple force of goodness and single-hearted devotion.

The life led by him was one of such complete hardship, and the strain upon him of mind and heart was so constant and severe, that that life was sure to end early, and in fact he was called to his rest almost *in mezzo del cammin di questa vita*, dying at the comparatively early age of forty-six. The close of a great life is always interesting. It is then that the main features of character show themselves with the greatest distinctness in the clearer light thrown upon them from the nearly approaching other world.

After what may be called “the retreat of the stigmata,” at La Vernia, Francis returned to the Portiuncula. This was in 1224. He was too weak to travel on foot; the Count Orlando, accordingly, had placed a horse at his disposal. The journey was marked by touching incidents, and by at least one miracle at Monte Casala, not far from Borgo San Sepolcro, where he remained for some days, and another at a neighbouring village. At Citta di Castello was another marvellous cure.*

His life, however, was nearing its close, but he had still sufferings and trials to endure before the end came. One of the greatest trials of his later life arose from the actions of

* St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, 119, 141, 198, 199; Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, 63, 64, 70; *Fioretti*, ii. iv. *consid.*

Brother Elias. Elias is one of those perplexing characters whom it is very difficult to judge with fairness. He had fine characteristics, but his conduct of Franciscan affairs was very extraordinary. The fact is, he seems to have been an exceedingly able man, to have had a warm love for St. Francis and admiration for his character, but probably a secret mistrust of his methods. On one side he appears to have been essentially what is called "a man of the world." He had great ambition, an ambition, not of a low or merely personal kind, but for the future of the Order. Francis he probably considered too transcendental and what we should call "unbusinesslike." His extreme views as to poverty he looked upon as exaggerated and unpractical. He conceived the Order as a great power, but on different lines from the lines of the founder, and, without actually violating the rule or appearing to oppose the wishes of St. Francis, he cleverly introduced and spread far and wide a different ideal as to the crucial point of evangelical poverty which was to exercise an immense influence on the future of the Friars Minor as time went on. The point to which Elias addressed himself was this: a steady relaxation in the rule of poverty, and this, as we know now, had far-reaching consequences. Elias was an immensely able administrator. His love for St. Francis was deep and sincere, and it was returned by St. Francis with warmth and tenderness. He had entire confidence in his Vicar-General. His eyes were not closed to a certain falling away in the spirit and temper of the Order, but the fault he attributed to the provincial minister,* and does not seem to have realised—so clever was Elias in his

* Cf. conform 136 b. ii., 138 b. ii., and 142 b. ii. The letter here would apply to any Minister-General, but certainly shows anxiety as to the conduct of affairs.

mode of action—that the real spring of change was in the Vicar-General. He felt the usefulness of Elias, and his great administrative ability, but there are proofs that he was not altogether satisfied with him. He addressed two letters to him which show that he was conscious of a too severe and domineering spirit in him. He expressed himself in conversation with one of the brothers during his illness at this time probably in a way which showed that he did not consider him a satisfactory successor to his place after his death, and both in a memorandum as to the true character of a good superior, and in his will, which was to be read by the brethren and observed with the rule—he evidently feared the line taken by Elias and those who sympathised with him, as likely to be detrimental to the Order. In fact there can be no doubt that, notwithstanding his high appreciation of the good qualities, and eminent abilities of the Vicar-General, St. Francis in these latter years of his life had begun to feel grave anxieties as to the new tone spreading in the Order, though he apparently could not put his finger upon any overt act which would connect it directly with Elias' administration. That Elias did, steadily and cleverly, work towards a considerable change, there can be no doubt. He was bent upon a more easy view of the rule of poverty, upon the establishment of the Order in something like the dignity of the more ancient Orders with their monasteries and properties—all which would however tend, of course, wholly to revolutionise the idea of St. Francis, and to make in fact, a totally different kind of community from that which the founder intended the Friars Minor to be.

From the attack of illness which followed at the Portiuncula, St. Francis partially recovered, and then began those

apostolic journeys and efforts which marked the closing days of his life. He was obliged to ride an ass, as he had no longer strength for journeys on foot. Wherever he went, the people as usual received him with increasing enthusiasm. He now entirely possessed their hearts, and there were quite outbursts of popular joy at his reappearance in public life again. He could not now bear severe exertion, and, in consequence, his sermons were short. They had in them, however, more and more of supernatural insight and fire, and more compelling than his actual words was the effect of his magnetic personal influence. He was worn with illness, emaciated and feeble, his voice was weak, and sustained exertion was impossible; but his face was, if possible, more beautiful than ever in its extreme pallor, and its usual expression of strength and tenderness deepened by the marks of suffering bravely borne.

It is probable that the immense success of his preaching stimulated him to increased exertion, exertion even beyond his strength, but he had never known to spare himself in anything, and it was not a lesson likely to be learnt now. A great trouble came upon him, however, "a thorn in the flesh;" possibly the same which had come upon St. Paul. His eyesight had long been failing, and with something of suddenness, it entirely gave way. Brother Elias was sent for. He urged his return to Assisi, but it was finally decided that they should go to Rieti where there was an oculist, who, according to the science of the times, was believed to possess exceptional skill.

The Pope and Cardinals were, at the moment, at Rieti. Rome was in a state of disturbance, and the Pontifical Court had fled for safety to the provinces. Francis'

reception was almost triumphal. The whole town turned out to receive him, and with the populace the members of the Sacred College, led, as we should expect, by Cardinal Ugolino. The little city was *en fête*. Francis was conducted with every mark of respect and affection to the presence of Honorius, and there welcomed as an honoured guest by the Bishop. He was also for a time at San Fabiano, near Rieti, and then at Monte Colombo. It was probably at Rieti, however, that he was treated for his suffering in the eyes.

The oculist applied all the somewhat cruel skill that could be used in those days. He subjected his patient to bleeding and cauterising. The sufferings of the patient were severe but borne with his usual courage and sweetness. He received the greatest love and care from the Cardinal and others, and at last the application of plasters relieved his eyes to a certain extent. He was able now, for a time, to resume his work. It is said that a canon named Gideon, who had led a very scandalous life, was suffering severely from paralysis. He implored the aid of St. Francis to restore him to strength. The saint had doubts on the subject, as he feared that a return to strength would only mean a return to sin, and he warned the sufferer of this danger and of the impending judgment of God if such proved to be the case. At last he consented to intercede for the sick man's recovery ; and it is said that in answer to his prayer the sufferer was suddenly and entirely cured. There is no sufficient reason to doubt this "miracle," by those who believe in the great promise given to "the prayer of a righteous man." Francis' terrible warning was disregarded, however, and his prophecy fulfilled. By the fall of a house, from which all except Canon Gideon escaped, he met his

death suddenly and terribly after having fallen back into his course of sin.*

Whilst still at Rieti, the cardinals and many others visited him constantly. It is asserted that the "stigmata" were seen by several of the Sacred College at this time, and Cardinal Segni, afterwards Pope Alexander IV., declared afterwards in the most public manner, that he had seen them himself. For greater rest and quiet he was at length removed to a Franciscan hermitage not far from the town. He is said at this time to have worked several miracles, among others the well-attested one of the cure of the plague which was just then attacking both man and beast.

As St. Francis' ailments did not give way before the treatment used, it was decided to consult a famous oculist in Siena. On the journey to Siena, in the neighbourhood of Radicofani, it was that the three young girls appeared, and then, in a marvellous manner, disappeared, whom St. Bonaventura believed to be representatives of the obedience, poverty and charity which marked the life of St. Francis.† At Siena, very painful remedies were applied according to the imperfect science of the time, as the chief cure was cauterising the temples with red hot irons. As far as his eyes were concerned there was some improvement. During the winter there were no alterations of better or worse condition, and in the spring, after a very severe attack, which seemed at the time likely to be fatal, the little company, including Brother Elias, who had been sent for when St. Francis was very ill, moved on to Cortona.

Cortona, one of the most ancient cities in Italy, stands

* Wadding *Ann. Min.*, tom. i., anno 1225, viii.

† St. Bonaventura, *Vita* 93; also Thomas of Celano, *Vita Secunda*, 3, 37.

on a hill side, with its quaint buildings and precipitous streets commanding a fine view over the Valle di Chiana, not very far from Lake Thrasymene. It is an old Etruscan city, and was one of the Etruscan League. In its main features and quaint buildings it is now, probably, very much as St. Francis saw it. Churches, indeed, have been added since those days, and the great painters Luca Signorelli and Pietro Borrettini, or Pietro di Cortona as he is generally called, have since then left precious treasures of art there in their frescoes. But the fine Etruscan walls, and the stately situation and the commanding view are much as they must have been before the eyes of St. Francis, or indeed, long before his time, before the eyes of Hannibal. The view from the Fortezza of Cortona is one of the most magnificent in middle Italy, where the eye sweeps over a vast and varied landscape, except behind the little city, where a ridge of the Apennines blocks the way. In these mountains, not far from the city, was the religious house known as the Cells, whither Francis along with Brother Guido, who had arrived to welcome him, desired to retire. The authorities of the city, however, positively refused to permit his departure. He was hindered forcibly and had to turn back from the gates. They wished that, as he was evidently approaching his end, he should die in their city, and that they should be the possessors of the relics of the saint. It is one of those strange instances of the intense religious sense (sometimes without knowledge) of the Middle Ages, odd and grotesque in its manifestations, which it is difficult for us now to realise.

St. Francis preached to a vast concourse in the cemetery; told them he must die at Santa Maria degli Angeli, but that he would leave Brother Guido to represent the Order

in Cortona. The following day the citizens agreed to his departure. St. Francis spent some time at the Cells. It was a time of quiet, of meditation and prayer, and practical preparation for the end. It was now, in all probability, that he prepared his will, which really meant his final instructions to the Order.

It is said that Brother Elias had had an intimation from the other world of Francis' approaching end ; but, indeed, it needed no supernatural witness to make it clear to all men that the end was drawing on.

A life of such intense and unremitting hardship had told upon a sensitive frame. Dropsy supervened on other things, and the thin spare limbs were terribly swollen. He at once expressed a strong desire to be removed to Assisi. He had a longing to be allowed to die near the spot so consecrated by the early memories of his first years, whether in the world or in "religion."

In the journey homewards which was now attempted, Brother Elias, who was in command, showed his prudence and ability. The simple way was by Perugia, but these were strange and troubled times. The citizens of Perugia would have had no hesitation in seizing Francis and compelling him to await his final call in their city, that they might possess themselves of the precious relics of the saint. Whether or not Brother Elias had actual information on the matter, it is certain that he dare not run the risk.

The eyes of all Italy were fixed upon Francis, and in the case of each city, if he could not live within their walls, they desired the prestige arising from the fact that, at least, there he might die. To us this seems strange beyond imagination, but in the Middle Ages religious ideas were real powers. If men lost love, on the whole

they did not lose faith, and they had, to us, a quite astonishing grip of the idea of the solidarity of the Church. The road by Perugia was simple and straightforward. Elias determined to abandon this. The journey had to be made slowly and with watchful care, for Francis' strength was failing fast, and, in his condition, nothing but his commanding will could have made such a journey possible.

The little cavalcade had to make a long *détour*. Perhaps they went as high up as Fabriano, if so they would have laboriously to cross the central Apennine chain, which now we penetrate by a tunnel. Above Fossato, which would then, at any rate, be reached, were probably perched then as they are now, the villages of Pazzolo and Pellegrino, of Talazzo, and San Facondino, those curious delightful Italian mountain villages, always strange, always interesting, unlike anything else in the world. Next would be Gualdo Tadino, where Totila had, long ago, been slain. If St. Francis had that constant power of prophecy which is attributed to him, how he must have been staggered, in his thorough and deep humility, to think of the church of San Francesco of later days, where Niccolo da Foligno has left his altar masterpiece.

At any rate, we know the little party descended the mountain side to Nocera close to the narrow Val Topina. Elias sent on from Nocera to ask for an escort from Assisi, as he feared even then some effort being made from Perugia to hinder their progress. The escort was granted readily. A halt was made at the mountain hamlet of Balciano, where it is said that Francis persuaded his bodyguard to ask for their food as mendicants instead of attempting to buy it. The latter method had failed,

the former succeeded.* Soon after this they reached Assisi where he was received with that subdued rejoicing which was natural in those who loved him, but knew that they could not keep him for long. "The city rejoiced," says his biographer, "at the approach of the blessed father, every tongue praised God; all were convinced that the holy man would die very soon."†

Francis was received by the bishop in his palace. All who saw his emaciated form and the unmistakable marks of increasing illness, knew that the care he needed could not possibly be supplied at the Portiuncula, and Francis submitted to the commands of the bishop, and remained under his hospitable roof at Assisi.

Probably the immense effort of the journey had been too much for the poor sufferer. He got rapidly worse. The swelling from the dropsy had entirely subsided, and instead of it came the most terrible emaciation. To move at all required extreme exertion. And in every part of his body was excruciating pain. If not formal martyrdom, it was practical martyrdom. His sufferings, however severe, were only the occasion for the constant exhibition of the sweetest and most sustained patience. He loved to speak of pain, as he had spoken of death, as a "dear sister." In the midst of terrible agonies, unrelieved by the many modern appliances for the relief of suffering, he was calm and happy, asking for sacred singing, especially his "Song of the Creatures," to lift his mind to higher things.‡

Francis knew that the end was coming. His thoughts,

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Secunda*, iii. 23; St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, 98.

† Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, 105.

‡ Thomas of Celano, *Vita Secunda*, iii. 139. He says: *Mortem cantand suscepit.*

however, were not of self, but of others. We form habits in life; we may be sure that they stick to us when we come to die. He had long formed a habit of entire self-forgetting. It stood by him now, by the grace of God. He desired to see those whom he loved one by one. He had a word for each, and gave them his blessing. Then he desired to see all the members of the community who were within reach. The scene, as recorded, is a most touching scene. They all knelt round; he crossed his hands, and his right hand rested on the head of Brother Elias, who knelt on the left side of the bed. "Whom does my hand touch?" he asked, for the poor blind eyes could no longer see. The answer came, "Elias, it touches the head of Elias." "That," said the Father, "is well. My son, I bless thee in all, and for all. As it is by thy hands that the Most High has multiplied my brethren and my sons, so I bless all of them in thee and on thee. May God, the Lord of all, bless thee in heaven and earth. For me, I bless thee as much as and more than I can. May He who can do all, supply what I cannot do; may He remember thy labour and thy toil; may he hear all thy prayers; and on the day of recompense may thy place be amongst the just." Then turning to all, he said: "Farewell, my dear sons, keep the fear of God, abide ever in Jesus Christ. Evil days draw on. Ye must pass through terrible trial. Blessed are they who shall persevere in what they have begun! Many will fall away through scandals. I go to God. I have served Him with devotion and with all my soul. I leave this world in the fulness of trust. May His grace abide with you." *

It is a touching scene, the parting from the father and

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Secunda*, iii. 108; St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, 211.

the children. Still time went on and the last scene was deferred. Brother Leo, who acted as St. Francis' confessor, was constantly with him. He had probably been chosen for that office, because of that sweetness and gentleness which had made St. Francis speak of him always as "God's little lamb." It is said that he had a great desire to possess the habit worn by St. Francis; it is also said that St. Francis had a kind of intuition of this desire, and that in one of these closing days, he told Brother Leo that he should have the habit when he was gone. The habit of St. Francis has been since then looked upon as an interesting relic; this, however, is by no means the habit which he bequeathed to Brother Leo, but that which he had worn at the time when he is said to have received the stigmata; this habit is preserved at this moment in the church of the Ognissanti at Florence. It is believed that St. Francis presented it to the Count Alberto Barbolani, the owner of Montalto, in whose castle he stayed after leaving La Vernia. In after years—in 1502—the castle was taken by the Florentines, and the habit, by the order of the Council of Ten, was removed to Florence. Of this we have evidence from the record of *Fra Mariano da Firenze* preserved in the convent of Ognissanti. Down to 1571, or thereabouts, this habit was kept in San Salvadore, and then was taken to the Ognissanti, to be placed under the high altar, where it may be seen to this day. There are Philistines—as Matthew Arnold would call them—excellent, but stupid people, who would be perfectly uninterested in a detail of this kind; but people who possess the inspirations of a warm heart, and that right form of imagination which enables them to realise the past, rise above this special form of stupidity.

The early autumn went gliding by—that time which in Umbria is almost more beautiful, if possible, than the spring. Year after year in his early youth St. Francis had been moved to a rapture of delight, realised by his sensitive nature, by the unspeakable and pathetic beauty of such a time. No one who has not wandered on the hills above Thrasymene, or the heights above Viterbo, can have any approximate idea of the magic beauty of an autumn in middle Italy. Autumn is always a beautiful time, with its own special pathos, wherever it is. In America, the colouring there—in the time which they call with a real touch of poetry, “the Fall”—is moving and sometimes magnificent, but often crude; in England, and especially in Devonshire and Cornwall, there is a tenderness in the colour of the fading leaves and the quiet landscapes which is calming, if sad. But no one can have any idea what an autumn can be, until he sees it in the changeful and splendid woods, in the glorious and yet gentle skies, in the mysterious misty sunrises, and more misty sunsets—misty, with that soft blue veil which softens every angle and deprives all vivid colour of anything approaching the crude—which may be seen in Umbria. The *Vendemmia* of middle Italy has a poetry all its own; it is not the mere poetry of human joyousness and tender fancy of which the poets have spoken; it is not merely that—

“ In the vats of Luna
This year, the must shall foam
Round the white feet of laughing girls
Whose sires have marched to Rome.”

It is not that. That is a beautiful picture—a picture that in some measure may be presented to the eyes of the traveller in middle Italy, near Orvieto, near

Viterbo, in the glorious days of autumn, even now. No, if there were no "laughing girls," if there were none of the joys of the vintage, still no one could close his eyes to the extraordinary attraction of the autumn in Umbria.

Francis had loved it with that keen sense of beauty, which he had felt about the natural world, and which now, by the grace of God, had been in him transferred to the

"Beautiful things made new for the surprise of the sky children."

But he never lost his intense feeling for natural beauty, and his deep love for nature in Italy, in all her wonderful changes. And now after a life of such unrelaxed and unswerving devotion to the highest ideals, his autumn days were travelling on in a beauty not less perfect than the loveliness of his beloved Umbria, towards their close.

It was drawing towards the end of September. Francis had appeared slightly better ; he, as well as all who loved him, knew perfectly that the end was coming, for his weakness was so extreme. In spite of his unbending will and marvellous spiritual power, his poor body—"my brother the body" as he called it—was scarcely capable of bearing any more. Indeed, looking at it as ordinary people may, it is astonishing that it had borne so much. For years and years there had been constant fatigue, what we should consider quite insufficient food, and pressing anxieties of every kind. Notwithstanding this, there had been the most marvellous energy, and an absolutely unfailing self-restraint and sweetness of disposition under all trials. It is true that he, to whom "to live was Christ," must have had constant sources of joy in the extraordinary

influence for good which he exercised, not only throughout Italy, but now throughout Europe. This vast and astonishing influence, arising indeed, in some measure, from his statesmanlike capacity, but far more from that entire self-forgetfulness, that love of others, that love of God which it is so difficult for ordinary people fully to comprehend, must have cost him much in many ways. However, as the month of September drew to a close, St. Francis expressed a strong desire to be moved to the Portiuncula from Assisi. He had the greatest wish to die near his beloved chapel, and the Bishop of Assisi, who was himself starting just then on a pilgrimage to Monte Gargano, agreed to it. He was in a state of such complete weakness that he had to be borne slowly down the mountain on a litter. It was when they reached the valley that that touching scene occurred which has been commemorated in art. He asked his bearers to turn him towards his native city, and rising with an effort to a sitting posture, and raising his right hand, he solemnly blessed Assisi.

On arriving at the Portiuncula he had himself carried and laid before the altar of the Blessed Virgin, that he might pray there for the last time. He then intreated the brethren never to abandon the Portiuncula ; "Never, O my children," he said, "abandon this place. If they drive you away on one side, return on the other ; it is truly a holy place ; God has placed His dwelling in it. Here the Almighty multiplied us when we were few in number ; here He illuminated the minds of His poor ones with the light of wisdom ; here He inflamed their hearts with the light of His love. He who shall here pray devoutly will obtain what he asks ; and he who sins will be punished the more rigorously. Have great respect, O my children

for this holy house, and sing in it the praises of the Lord, fervently and joyfully."* This advice he is said to have repeated again and again.

It was soon after this that he made known to them his last will and testament.† It was the last guidance that he left to the Order, as to the line they were to take, and the manner of their work in the world. It is quite evident from this, and from the care that he took in writing it, and commanding it to be preserved and read with the rule, that he was most anxious (1) that the Order should preserve his ideas as to holy poverty ; (2) that they should strictly observe Church order ; (3) that they should respect work and avoid idleness.

The publication of this will to the brethren was practically his last act for them. He made them sit round him after this, for a short time, and spoke to them encouraging and loving words, and spoke tenderly and kindly about Santa Chiara and the sisters of the Second Order, but he does not seem to have said anything more about the affairs of the Order or about any difficulties that might arise with regard to the rule, except that, in evident allusion to the efforts that had been made in some quarters to modify the rule of poverty, he is said to have observed, "Doubtless there are other rules, but we must put the Gospel and its maxims above all the rest." After this he crossed his hands as he loved to do, and blessed them one by one, praying for a blessing upon all who were far away, and all who should enter the Order to the end of time. There was another touching incident before his death. He had never been ordained to the

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, 106; *Speculum*, 32, 6, 696-71, a; *Tres Socii*, 56; Thomas of Celano, *Vita Secunda*, i. 12 and 13; St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, 24 and 25.

† See Appendix II.

priesthood, and could not therefore consecrate the Blessed Sacrament ; but he sent for some bread, and blessed it, and broke it and gave a piece to each ; and they all ate it together, as a sort of *pain bénit*, or memorial of the Blessed Sacrament. He then asked two of the brethren to sing him his Song of the Creatures, and again he spoke of his death in his usual tender language, saying, "Welcome, my sister Death." He had received the last sacraments and then he gave directions as follows : "As soon as you see me in my last extremity, lay me naked on the bare ground and when I am dead, leave me so for the space of time that would be required for a man to go a mile, walking slowly."* This direction was carefully attended to, and it was felt that it arose from his constant desire to conform himself to the likeness of Christ in all things, who had hung for some time dead upon the cross. When his last moments were just approaching one of the brethren expressed their sorrow at losing him, begged him to remember them and prayed his forgiveness to them for anything that they might have done wrong towards him. "My son," he replied, "God is calling me ; I forgive my brethren, those present and those absent, all their sins and faults. I absolve them in so far as I have power to do so ; tell them so and bless them in my name."† He then asked them to bring the book of the Gospels and to read to him the story of the Passion from the Gospel of St. John, beginning with the words : "Before the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour was come, &c." He listened attentively, then asked them to cover him with the hair cloth and ashes, which they did, and then began to recite Psalm cxlii. : "I cried unto the Lord with

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Secunda* iii. 139 ; St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, 209, 210.

† Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, 109.

my voice." The last verse is as follows : " Bring my soul out of prison, that I may give thanks unto Thy name, which thing if Thou wilt grant me, then shall the righteous resort unto my company."

When these words had been recited, his soul passed quietly away. The fifty brethren who were with him, were kneeling round ; the evening twilight had been gathering in. There is a sweet story told by St. Bonaventura, that late as it was, a number of larks—birds of the light and of the morning—hovered around twittering, close to the roof of the dwelling where the saint who had so dearly loved the creatures, had just gone to join the Sons of the Morning.*

St. Francis was forty-six at the time of his death ; it was just twenty years since he had begun to restore the church of St. Damian, and eighteen years since the first foundation of the Order. He died on October 4, 1226, or strictly speaking, according to our reckoning, on the eve of October 3, after vespers. October 4 has been always in the Church's calendar St. Francis' Day.

All sorts of stories are told of how the soul of Francis appeared to one or another immediately after his death. Soon after the event, the brethren arranged a kind of lying-in-state ; the body was placed on a piece of tapestry, presented by St. Francis' old friend, the Roman lady, Jacqueline of Settisoli.† It is said that the brethren were greatly consoled by the change that passed over the saint's face ; it had had a look of suffering and the complexion had been darkened by fatigue and fever, it now became

* St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. xiv., 211 *ad fin.*

† It appears probable that she was present. The Bollandists deny this, but only on general principles. The testimony of Bernard de Busa, and the *Speculum*, 133a, and 137a, and the *Fioretti* seems conclusive. See Sabatier, *Vit.*, p. 394, note.

radiant and beautiful, and with the fair, sweet look of his boyish days. The brethren now, all of them, saw the stigmata. Up to this time very few, with the exception of brother Leo, had seen them, so careful had Francis been to conceal them, but now they were visible to all.

On hearing of the death of Francis, there was great excitement in Assisi. Immense crowds came to the Portiuncula to see the body of the saint ; at night, there were thousands of tapers lighted and hymns and canticles were sung by the brethren. It was determined that the funeral should be immediately, for there was a great fear in the minds of all lest the body should be taken from them, that the precious relics might be preserved elsewhere. The funeral took place early on the Sunday morning ; all the authorities of the city of Assisi and in fact all the citizens, attended. It was a great procession ; before the bier marched the men-at-arms blowing trumpets, then came the brethren carrying lighted torches and the huge procession of the people followed, and it was noticed that the hymns and canticles were not sung in mournful tones like dirges, but sung in tones of triumph. The procession paused as it passed San Damiano, in order that Santa Chiara and her sisters might see his face once more. The body was carried into the chapel and placed near the *grille*, the door of which was opened so that the sisters were able to be very close to it, and are even said to have kissed the stigmata on one of the hands. The grief of Santa Chiara and her sisters was very great, for they felt that they had indeed lost not only a founder but a father.* After this, the body was carried to the Church of St. Giorgio and placed in the lower part of the church, until a more suitable resting-place was shortly prepared for it by the

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, 116, 117 ; St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, 219.

care of Brother Elias. Here it remained until finally moved to the spot where it has rested ever since.

On March 18, 1227, Pope Honoriūs died. He had been a steady benefactor and friend to St. Francis ; he had granted him the Indulgence of the Portiuncula, had ratified the final rule and had appointed Cardinal Ugolino as protector of the Franciscans. On his death, however, the Order had as staunch a friend in his successor. The very day after his death, Cardinal Ugolino himself was unanimously elected to the papal throne, under the title of Gregory IX. He was more than eighty-five years of age, but a man of extreme vigour, which did not abate during the fourteen years that remained to him before his death. He commissioned Brother Elias almost immediately to prepare a noble church at Assisi, as a resting-place and a monument to St. Francis. Brother Elias undertook this work and carried it out with his usual vigour. He himself was not re-elected as Minister-general ; in his place, the brethren chose Giovanni Parenti, who had been Provincial of Spain. He was a man of gravity and justice of mind and also deeply spiritual, and he felt with St. Francis entirely on the question of evangelical poverty. This was a great satisfaction to the brethren and probably to Pope Gregory IX. himself.

Early in the spring of 1228, the Pontiff came, together with the whole of the Sacred College, to Assisi. There had been one of those commotions in Rome which were not uncommon at the time, and which not infrequently drove the Popes to the provinces. Pausing at Rieti and then for a few days at Spoleto, they advanced to Assisi. The first thing that Gregory did was to visit Santa Chiara and her sisters at San Damiano ; it was looked upon as an unheard-of condescension on the part of the Pontiff, but

men were more than ever convinced in consequence that the canonisation of St. Francis had been practically determined upon. Gregory was received with the greatest honour at Assisi. His first act was to visit the tomb of St. Francis, and it was noticed that, prostrated there, he shed many tears. The usual inquiry was now instituted, which has to be carried on before any canonisation; immense testimony from all parts is said to have been given and is recorded at great length by his biographers as to the miracles that he had wrought in his life, and since his death. Testimony was also taken concerning the sacred stigmata. Among the miracles, there were accounts of the raising of the dead, of saving those in peril of death, of delivery from shipwreck, from chains and dungeons, of help and blessing at times of child-birth, of the opening of the eyes of the blind and the cure of various sicknesses, as well as of other wonders.*

The Pope is said to have proceeded with the utmost strictness and to have appointed on the commission many cardinals who were the most opposed to the "cause." After careful examination, there was a unanimous decision in favour of the sanctity of St. Francis. The Pope had meantime removed to Perugia, but there the process was continued. At last it was announced that the thing was decided, and that a formal decree would be issued in the church of San Giorgio in Assisi on Sunday, July 16. The appointed day was looked forward to with intense eagerness, the summer weather in the Umbrian mountains was everything that could be desired. The church had been made splendid with drapery and lights and flowers; the crowd which attended was immense, among others, Santa

* St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. xvi. secs. 1-8; Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, caps. ii. and iii.; *Tres Socii*, cap. v.

Chiara and the Second Order with her, and numbers of other religious Orders, besides Franciscans themselves. The Pope was attended by a splendid retinue of abbots and bishops, and must have been a striking figure himself, from his great height and flowing grey hair and magnificent pontifical robes. He himself addressed the assembly on the subject before them, until he was so overwhelmed by emotion that he could continue no longer. Then the record of the miracles was read by the cardinal-deacon Ottaviano Conti; then followed an address from Cardinal Raniero Cappoccio. After this the Pope, arising from his throne, pronounced the decree of canonisation; then was sung the *Te Deum*, followed by a blare of trumpets and ringing of bells. When this was ended, Pope Gregory descended to the lower church, to the tomb of the saint and said the mass, surrounded by the Friars Minor carrying olive branches and torches. It was a day of delight and enthusiasm and was never forgotten in Assisi.*

Brother Elias acted with great efficiency in arranging for the church to St. Francis' memory. He selected an excellent site on a hill situated on the western extremity of the town; it was the property of one Simone Puzzarelli, a rich and generous citizen. He gave the site, and Elias had obtained the services of an eminent architect, Lapo, a Lombard. The plans had been prepared and all arrangements made, and the foundation-stone was laid by Pope Gregory on the day after the canonisation. The hill had been known up to this time—as it was said to have been a place of execution—as the Colle del Inferno, and the name was now changed by the Pontiff to the Colle del Paradiso. On the day following, the

* Thomas of Celano, *Vita Prima*, lib. iii. cap. i. 122, 123; *Tres Socii*, cap. v. 71.

Pope returned to Perugia and immediately issued a Bull recommending devotion to St. Francis throughout Christendom, and appointing the 4th of October as his festival. Not content with this, he issued a second Bull, on the 29th of February following, to the same effect, and determined that a proper office, entirely new, should be composed before the first festival of the saint. He himself contributed much towards it, as did many of the cardinals.

The church of St. Francis grew apace. In April 1230 —Elias had acted with such vigour—the lower church was all but completed. The Pope, on hearing of it, issued another Bull that month, in which he ordered that this church should be the mother and mistress of the Order which St. Francis had founded, that it should be directly connected with the Holy See and have especial privileges, and he authorised the translation of the body of St. Francis from the church of San Giorgio.

It was intended by the Pope that the translation should take place with all possible dignity, although he was not able to be there in person. The time appointed for it was the eve of Whitsunday, and Giovanni Parenti, the Minister-general, had, with a view to this, convoked a general Chapter at Assisi. Brother Elias, however, had other schemes; it is difficult to understand in this, as in many other things, what was the real intention of this extraordinary man. The story of the translation is, however, as follows. It is said that Elias had a private conference with the magistrates of Assisi, and managed to persuade them that if the place of sepulture were known to many, sooner or later the sacred relics would be carried away by some of the neighbouring cities, and that it was most undesirable to have so large a body of

witnesses present. It was decided, therefore, that the ceremony should take place three days earlier than the date originally fixed. The body was accordingly raised from its original resting-place; over it was thrown a rich piece of tapestry, the gift of Queen Blanche, mother of St. Louis; a number of the brethren bore it upon their shoulders, and the procession advanced slowly towards the new church. Quite suddenly out there swarmed from the neighbouring streets bodies of the men-at-arms of the commune and charged the procession with their lances. There followed, of course, the utmost confusion, and in the midst of this certain men appointed to the work seized the body, and rushing into the church closed the doors, and, placing the body in the sarcophagus already prepared for it, completed the burial arrangements before any one was allowed to enter. Very general was the indignation felt both among the townsfolk and amongst the brethren of the Order, but the arrangements had been so well made, the plan so well carried out, and the secret so well kept, that it was not till centuries afterwards that the exact spot of burial was known. In 1818, by the permission of Pope Pius VII., the then Minister-general of the Order was permitted to make a search, and the body was then found and identified. The cave in which the body had been laid, and where it still rests, has been enlarged since those days, and is known in our own time as the Third Church.*

Having succeeded so well in one enterprise, Elias attempted another. In the Chapter immediately after-

* *Tres Socii*, cap. v. 72; St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. xv. 222; Wadding, *Ann. Min.*, Anno 1230. Chavin de Malan absurdly attempts to make us believe it was all a tumult of the citizens of Assisi! Unhappily he often writes rather for "edification" than truth. Elias had evidently managed the whole thing.

wards he almost succeeded, by a kind of *coup-de-main*, in seizing upon the position of Minister-general; this however, was prevented. Giovanni Parenti was reinstated; Elias professed his sorrow, and was banished to a monastery at a distance from Assisi, where it is said his signs of repentance were so evidently thorough that he succeeded at last in convincing the Order of his sincerity.*

Meantime, the building of the upper church went on, and was completed in less than six years. The three churches, as they are still to be seen at Assisi, form not only a monument to the genius and taste of the thirteenth century, but also to the strong faith of his contemporaries in one who, by simple goodness and absolute self-sacrifice, had led them back in such multitudes from worldliness and misery to the faith and fear of God.

* Wadding, *Ann. Min.*, Anno 1230, viii.—x.

CHAPTER XI

THE INFLUENCE OF ST. FRANCIS UPON ART AND LITERATURE

IT would be a gravely insufficient sketch of St. Francis' life and work if we failed to dwell—in however cursory a manner—upon his general influence upon art and literature.

Religion, which is the highest and most important of all things, is sure to tell upon various departments of man's activity where it is practical and earnest; for all those departments are clearly connected with, though they may not be the full expression of, the man himself. It is, we know, a maimed, a one-sided view of life which treats the cultivation of the mind, or the eye, or the taste as being the cultivation of the man. Many of these things he must leave behind him when he dies, what he permanently possesses, what he carries with him always, is the character formed here. Religion touches the man himself and his own direct, personal relation with God, but as it is so it therefore affects all the departments of his activity. So great, so deep, so strong a religious movement as that of the Franciscans in the thirteenth century was, therefore, certain to have its influence upon the literature and art of the time. And it had.

The state of literature in the opening days of the

century was far from satisfactory. The Troubadours undoubtedly did a work which was, in great measure, of real value. They inspired a very deep enthusiasm for ideal life. M. Guizot says: "In the childhood of society poetry is not only a pleasure and a natural diversion, it is a source of progress; it elevates and develops the moral nature of men at the same time that it amuses and excites." Love and constancy and lofty courage, romantic adventures and manly exploits, were the themes of these early bards. They opened a new world; they created splendid dreams for the young and eager and ardent spirits of the time. But there is a law of reaction in human things, and alas! the best things may degenerate. "Corruptio optimi pessima." What was bright and good and inspiring became evil. Worldliness, and pleasure seeking, and then vice took the place of what had been noble and pure. Religious life ever must depend upon moral life. Where morality decays, religion will be shaken. It is not always realised what sceptical, and even atheistical, tendencies showed themselves in that age. It was not merely an "age of faith;" side by side with strong belief there was creeping infidelity. The literature of the time—such as it was—reflected this. Among other achievements of the great reformer—an achievement noway conscious nor directly intended—was the raising of the literary standard, almost the creation of a new literary world.*

In architecture there were indeed glorious buildings, but in Italy there was much ruin and decay following in the train of the worldliness and slackness so prevalent among ecclesiastics of the time. St. Francis' early

* Cf. *De la Poésie Provençale-Italienne*, by C. Fauriel, "Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes," tom. iv. p. 189, &c.

enthusiasm for church restoration, his efforts for the rebuilding of St. Damian and Santa Maria degli Angeli sprang from a misapprehension of the meaning of the divine voice which called him to rebuild an injured and tottering Church, but the misapprehension naturally arose from the state of material decay before his eyes. The thirteenth century witnessed the building or restoration of some of the most stately ecclesiastical buildings of the Middle Ages, and much of the impulse to this came from the religious enthusiasm kindled among the people by St. Francis and his followers.*

The Church had long been the home and teacher of the art of painting. Things had, however, in this department of art remained stiff, conventional, and unprogressive. The Byzantine tone prevailed. It was not in the nature of things that it could give permanent satisfaction. Throughout Italy there was a movement for freedom. The tightened bands of the feudal system were being broken. The struggle between the old tyranny and the longing for the free breath of liberty was going on. The arts were sure, especially among that gifted race, to feel the influence of this. It was just then that what was needed, came. There was needed a breath of life, a spring and force of inspiration, and it came from the movement of St. Francis.

This is evidently so when we think again of some of the moral conditions which St. Francis formed. In England violent struggles were going on, and, doubtless, in some instances that we know of, in many also of which we do not know, brute force prevailed. Henry II. had had his

* The tendency to free handling of things had set in. In the early part of the following century it developed in such men as Michael of Cesena, Marsiglio of Padua, William of Occam, and others.

long struggle with St. Thomas of Canterbury, which had ended in the murder of the latter. The Church had her sins and faults, but still she had not altogether forgotten that her kingdom was not of this world. The world, however, had deeply corrupted her, and where champions of spiritual things and an unseen kingdom arose, they were apt to be treated as St. Thomas had been.

In France, especially in Southern France, men saw a appalling spectacle of religious anarchy and confusion. Numberless sects were rising, carrying on internecine war among themselves, but always ready to unite against the Church. They were not altogether in the wrong. Faults, as usual, were to be found on both sides. Things were not right, and there was a general desire for reform. As usual, "use and wont" and evil custom were difficult to displace, and where there was resistance to needed reform then, on the other side, there was sure to be revolt.

There was, however, unfortunately, as often in such cases—as afterwards in the sixteenth century—not only revolt against what was really evil in the Church, but also revolt against the restraints of Christianity and the discipline and teaching of Christ. The Albigenses, for instance, were not only justly incensed at ecclesiastical faults and corruptions; they were also wrong-headed Manichæan heretics. In Spain a fierce struggle was going on, not always in a way creditable to Christianity, between the Church and Islam. Philip Augustus in France and Frederic II. in Germany were both in opposition to religion and in conflict with the Church. Frederic, indeed, with all his remarkable gifts, and wonderful political prescience, was intellectually a sceptic, and morally a votary of luxury and vice. The old enthusiasm of the crusading times was dying down.

The gigantic efforts of united Christendom had ended in nothing but disaster. It is a dangerous thing at all times for men to go beyond their grace. Any over-strain is sure to lead to a corresponding violence of reaction. The consequence of the Crusades, which had begun with such high hopes and noble purposes, was weariness and despondency. Men were "sick with a hope out of mind." Infidelity and even atheism were in the air. Jerusalem had fallen before the soldiers of Saladin in 1187. Wide and far were miseries partly due to the Crusades. Wide and far brute force and tyranny were struggling to keep down the longing for freedom. Italy had struggled nobly for liberty. It was cut up now into small republics, striving to withstand larger tyrannies and falling under the sway of smaller ones. There was a party for national independence, for the Church, for the Holy See as representing this—the Guelphs. There was a party for feudal power and for the triumph of the Emperor—the Ghibellines. And Guelphs and Ghibellines were then and for long after, under varying names, in constant struggle. Sicily was suffering from the cruelties of Henry VI., Italy from the cruelty of a multitude of masters. Men felt the world out of joint; with this came despondency, then irreligion, then immorality.

The evil had spread into the Church. Among the clergy and among the religious there was a general and fatal laxity. The Benedictines had ceased to be so vigorous and so powerful as of yore. The Cistercians were, indeed, preserving their monastic life as before, but they were quiet in their cloister, and exercising no wide sway upon the times. St. Bernard was dead. There was no commanding voice to reach men's souls. The art and literature of a people are sure indices of its moral con-

dition; the rise of moral purpose, the vigour of a more determined manliness, the spirit of a purer self-sacrifice, all these soon showed themselves in the corresponding change which passed over art.

For, indeed, a marvellous change had passed over all classes. Not Umbria only but all Italy, not Italy alone but all Europe, had become another world. The heavens were opened again. Men learned literally and boldly to live in view, in hope, of immortality. Religion may have, and has, many aspects, and sometimes and necessarily it is austere. There is, however, to those who have eyes to see, in Christianity a "beautiful world made new for the surprise of the sky children." Francis' religion was a beautiful religion. Severe and ascetic as he was, his spirit was one of gentleness and beauty. His own person was attractive, and men agreed in their admiration of the fascinating combination of tenderness and strength which they noticed in him.

We possess a description of him from his contemporary historian which brings this home. He was, we are told, of middle height, rather small in build, but if in his form there was no appearance of great strength, there was, what more than compensated for it, a certain deftness, good proportion and refinement. He had an oval face, a forehead of great smoothness, dark eyes, a finely cut nose and a beautiful mouth. Indeed, in the most masterly pictures of him, in which the genius of great men has reproduced the traditional appearance, we are especially struck by the beauty of expression about the mouth. His skin was white and of delicate texture, his hair dark chestnut, and his beard dark and close. He seems to have been a beautiful person, but, above all, to have possessed that indefinable charm which comes from

the expression in the face of a bright and sympathetic soul. He had a musical voice and his speech was clear and pleasant. We can well believe what Thomas of Celano tells us of his appearance, for there has ever been traditionally preserved—even in the Spanish schools where the painters have strained after an exaggerated asceticism—this suggestion of refined and manly beauty.*

His own person and temper were sure to lend inspiration to art, but, it has been well observed,† there were very distinct and striking sources of poetry in him.

(1) The first and great source of inspiration was his love for God. St. Francis learnt this, or rather received this gift first and chiefly by contemplation of the Cross. In solitary places and in lonely hours he meditated upon Jesus crucified, and in that supreme exhibition of love he learned the love of God, this love for God which came, and only could come, with Christianity. “This new and singular phenomenon,” it has been said,‡ “rising up as it seemed out of the earth, amid all the firmly rooted traditions and customs of an age when human institutions seemed to have acquired a solidity unknown before, beneath the majestic and immovable sway of Rome, encompassed by the vast Jewish brotherhood, the competing Oriental religions of Syria, India, Egypt, Phrygia, the philosophical speculations and debates of the Greek schools, the wisdom, the power, the common sense, the mingled loftiness and brutality of the imperial ruling race—this new ‘way’ of thought and life, carrying the ‘mind’ of the Crucified, His heavenliness, His humbleness, His love, to mart and synagogue and judg-

* Thomas of Celano, cap. x. 83.

† By Ozanam (as well as by others), *Les Poètes Franciscains en Italie*, pp 68-75. ‡ Dean Church, *Discipline of the Christian Character*, p. 113.

ment-seat, to passenger ship and obscure provincial suburb, to palace and gaol and traveller's lodging—the strange convinced seriousness, so out of sympathy with all things round it, could it last? . . . this new key to all things in the world and all things in the human heart, new in phrase as it was new in thought, 'the love of God,' *'caritas Dei'*—these overpowering and abiding convictions of the inexpressible wonder and hope of human destiny, ending always in the plainest, homeliest, most direct practical precepts for the pure and honest conduct of life—could this be except in the fervour of a first love?"

Yes, we answer, this could, for this was. St. Francis is one of the most notable proofs of it. To quote from the same: "St. Francis of Assisi, who, when all round him was sunk in worldliness and selfishness, rose up and with princely heart, as the great poet says,* claimed as his spouse the poverty of Jesus Christ, whose love, kindled by the love of the Crucified, overflowed over the souls of men, to all that the Crucified had made, beasts of the field, and birds of the air who, giving up all for Christ, set himself as the business of his life to share and understand the lot of the poor, the weak, the wretched; to dignify their condition, to comfort them with his boundless sympathy would not St. Paul have hailed him as indeed 'like-minded'? Here, halfway down the centuries, 'the mind of Christ' is realised in a man."†

Yes, St. Francis had given to him that marvellous grace to know alone God perfectly. To him came home the *caritas Dei*, the truth that man was dear to God, and that God, as seen "in the face of Jesus Christ," could be most dear to man; to him came home the truth that

* Dante, *Paradiso*, xi. 91.

† Dean Church, *Discipline of the Christian Character*, pp. 127, 128, 129.

man's heart is formed to answer to the love of God. Here was a spring of a new life ; here a force to change the world ; here a fount of divine poetry, a power of inspiration for life and art.

(2) And closely connected with this love, of course, the love of humanity. It is not really possible to love God without loving others. St. John reminds us that we cannot love God whom we have not seen unless we love our brethren whom we have seen.* In fact we usually climb up, so to speak, to the love of God by love for others. St. Francis loved with an ardent affection. His charity which "began at home," being genuine, did not end there. He loved his brethren and sons in the Order with a careful and faithful devotion. He loved the sick with a special compassionate tenderness, and, above all and always, the poor. In them he saw Jesus Christ. Their sorrows and privations reminded him of his Divine Master. They were not only his special charge, they were very really dear to him. There was in him also the full power of a grateful love. To those who had been kind to him, amid his many trials, he extended a simple and unflagging affection. As ingratitude is one of the basest forms of sin, so gratitude is one of the sweetest forms of love. We cannot fail to notice that this bright love, illuminating his heart and life, was the spring of a real inspiration for the thought and genius of the age. As it affected men's souls, so it affected their literature, their art, and their social life.

(3) And further, St. Francis had a remarkable love of Nature. It was in great measure dear to him because it was God's work. But more than that, he had in him—and naturally—a strong sense of duty. As a child, we are

* 1 John iv. 20.

told, his face shone with delight at the sight of flowers, and as a young man, trees and hills and changeful clouds and the overarching sky were to him a constant source of delight. The more he advanced in the path of holiness, the more dear became these to him. It is a striking thing that among the ancients there appears to have been little of the love of Nature. Very rarely, indeed, is Nature referred to in Greek and Latin literature as a friend. It remained for Christianity to teach men that Nature herself is a revelation of God in His goodness and beauty.* To know and love God is to know and love all that God has made, but in natures of a higher or more refined type this love is purified and carried to the highest pitch. Ozanam has remarked † that with all poets and poetasters admiration for Nature is common ground. With these, however, the praise of Nature had become a merely conventional formula. It is, however, a totally different thing to go forth from oneself, and consider the external world with disinterested respect, learning from it not only enjoyment and pleasure, but also lessons of truth. Francis everywhere in Nature saw God. There have been religious and even saintly men who have been so austere and so overwhelmed with the awfulness of evil, and its prevailing presence, that they could only think of Nature as veiling corruption. St. Francis' whole spirit and temperament led him to a very different habit of thought. Just as in the worst men he loved the excellence of possible goodness—the Christ that might be formed or found in them—so in Nature under all aspects he saw some

* But see as above (chap. ix. p. 231), *per contra, Good Words : Bits about Books*, by W. Canton, April 1897. This article is very interesting and able. I cannot but think it more ingenious than convincing.

† *Les Poètes Franciscains*, pp. 75-77.

■ message and work of God. Nothing was too insignificant
 ■ for his notice, or too unworthy for his sympathy. His
 ■ biographer* tells us that he was ever drawn to the contemplation of the origin of things, and therefore of the Maker of all ; that in beautiful things he saw the eternal beauty and rejoiced in all the works of God's hands, and that all things needing it he touched with his compassion, from his loving sense of Christ's compassion and bitter sufferings for us all. He loved "rocks and forests and harvests and vines, the beauty of the fields, the freshness of fountains, the verdant gardens, the earth, the fire, the air, the winds," and spoke to them as living creatures, "exhorting them to remain pure and to honour and serve God."† He saw beyond the strain of ordinary vision. He seemed to see the bonds which bind the material and moral order, and the ties which link the mysteries of Nature with the mysteries of faith. The birds and beasts and flowers he spoke of as his brethren and sisters, and many sweet stories are told of his compassion to the sufferings of animals—a tender feeling much more unusual then than now, and always less common among southern peoples than amongst those of the north. Sweet stories, too, are told of how hunted creatures—the pheasants and the hares—ran to him for protection, and hid themselves in the folds of his habit.‡

There was, in fact, in St. Francis a manifestation of the very highest power, of that elevation and purification of the affections which was a striking effect of Christianity among the Latin nations. It has been well said :

"In the Roman character the affections—though far,

* Thomas of Celano, ix.

† Ozanam, *id.* 74.

‡ St. Bonaventura, *Vita*, cap. viii. 113, and the *Fioretti*.

indeed, from being absent, for how could they be in a race with such high points of human nobleness - were yet habitually allowed but little play, and, indeed, in their most typical and honoured models of excellence, jealously repressed ; and yet in the modern races, on the other hand, which stand in their place, character is penetrated and permeated, visibly, notoriously, by a development and life of the affections and the emotional part of our nature to which we can see nothing parallel in ancient times. . . . To the ancients that well-known idea which we call 'sentiment' did not exist, any more than that which we call 'charity'. . . . Affections with them were looked on with mistrust and misgiving ; it was the proper thing to repress, to drown them. . . . Now, if you have ever met with anything in character, French or Italian, which specially charmed you, either in literature or in real life, I am sure that you would find the root and the secret of it in the fulness and play of the affections ; in their unfolding, and in their ready disclosure ; in the way in which they have blossomed into flowers of strange richness and varied beauty ; in the inexpressible charm, and grace, and delicacy, and freedom which they have infused into word and act and demeanour, into a man's relation with his family, his parents, his brothers and sisters, into his friendships, and, if he has been a religious man, into his religious life. In good and in bad literature, in the books and in the manners which have half ruined France, and in those which are still her redemption and hope, still you find, in one way or another, the dominant and animating element, in some strong form and exhibition, of the affections. . . . And so with the Italians. The great place which the affections have taken in their national character, and the ways in which the affections unfold and reveal themselves, are distinctive and momentous. More than genius by itself, more than sagacity and temperate good sense which Italians claim, or than the craft with which others have credited them, this power of the affections has determined the place of Italy in modern civilisation. . . . Take for instance . . . one of the favourite Italian saints, St. Francis ; one who both reflected and also evoked what was in the heart of the people ; one . . . who was once a marvellous power in

the world. . . . When St. Francis resolves to be poor he does not stop there. His purpose blossoms out into the most wonderful development of the affections, of all that is loving, of all that is sympathetic, of all that is cheerful and warm and glad and gracious. . . . He was the friend of everything that suffered and rejoiced. . . . He cast a charm on Italian democracies; he woke up a response at once in the hearts of labourers and scholars.”*

He is in fact an example, *par excellence*, of the development of affection, by the power of Christianity, among the Latin nations. I have quoted the above wise words at length because they express more exactly than I can express it the power by which St. Francis inspired the art and literature and social movement of his time. He was indeed a saint. He was one of those men so much above us that we smile at the conceited assurance of his critics in a time so shallow and materialistic as our own; but he touches us all by his special natural gifts and supernatural graces, and by these—all filled and fired with divine affections—he gave an impetus in the best direction to the thought, and, therefore, to the works of men.

The incidents of his life, indeed, lent themselves to artistic treatment. Here was a fresh and beautiful time of youth, bright with the glow of sundawn, and sweet with the tenderness and loveliness of unsoiled and uncorrupted strength. Here was one far above conventional vulgarities—so powerful with all men, with us English always mighty—who worked a real reconciliation between rich and poor. Here was one who, in his Third Order, carried deep piety and sincere religion into the ordinary haunts of common life. Here was one who in religion had all the glow and charm of chivalry—“the chevalier

* Dean Church, *Christianity and the Latin Race* pp. 225-234.

of the Crucified, the standard-bearer of Christ, the leader of the holy host of God," as he was called. Here was the real founder of a new order of chivalry, an order deeply religious—"the protector of the poor, the great champion fighting against wrong." It could not fail but that such a one should give a new impulse to life in his time, and therefore to art.

Art in its widest sense gained a marvellous impulse from his work and effort. French and Provençal literature had existed before him. Byzantine schools of painting had flourished. He gave life to the stiff Byzantine Italian literature—to which all literature owes so much—he created. It has been truly said, "Without Francis, no Dante."

But now we turn to the impulse given by this striking life, this great, unique, and beautiful character, to art, properly so called.

St. Francis, as must be felt, was a real subject for art. His physical beauty, his inexpressible sweetness—more than physical beauty—which shed a supernatural sunlight over his whole life; the wonderful circumstances of his career; the poetry of his personal originality, of his intensely human sympathy, of his divine illuminations; the romance of his surroundings; the beauty and pathos of a soul entirely fearless, entirely determined, entirely sympathetic, entirely free from any form of selfishness and self-seeking; his brightness and sweetness, his tenderness and considerateness, joined with immovable strength—these things lent themselves to art. For art is the expression of ideal things, that is, of things as they are; not in the always shallow, and often foul, realistic presentation of them so popular in our times, which means the merely external expression of the worse

accidents of substantial things. So great a character, and in so critical an age, was sure to lend himself to art. And St. Francis did.

There are few saints who have been more constantly reproduced by great artists. The first portrait I can remember is that of F. Eudes, a Benedictine of Subiaco, in the chapel of St. Gregory the Great at Subiaco, of the thirteenth century.* There is another done only nine years after the saint's death, by Bonaventura Berlinghieri. Then follows the work of Giunta Pisano, then Cimabuë,† then Giotto himself.‡

The great churches of Assisi dedicated to the memory of the saint became a very cradle of a revival of the highest art. Even in their faded and passing glories, the splendid examples there, which circle round the person of St. Francis, are the very beginnings, the very springs of a higher life of art. Guido da Siena and Giunta Pisano here first showed their natural power, and freed themselves from the stiffness of the Greeks.

After them came Cimabuë. The upper church was adorned by him with a fine series of paintings of which, alas ! time has left only the remnants ; but even this long stretch of years has not destroyed the stateliness of the heads of the Christ, of Our Lady, and St. John. This still

* This is certainly stiff and Byzantine, but still, it is very real and wonderfully full of *life*. It is rude but strong. It is moving because it places before us "your Brother Francis," and was painted in his lifetime and before the "stigmata."

† Cimabuë remained for some time at Assisi, and probably there came to him the first inspiration which broke the old, stiff, Byzantine manner.

‡ Giotto was a fresh departure. Here, if ever, was original genius and the fresh breath of heaven. How deeply St. Francis moved him the remnants of his frescoes show. Cf. Rio, *De l'Art Chrétien*, tome i. p. 238. Giotto, the friend of Dante, has immortalised the saint from whom his inspiration came.

remains, and also his drawings of the four great Doctors of the Church. After him came Giotto ; he flourished about 1276, that is, rather more than half a century after the birth of St. Francis. It has been truly said of him that he created the especial glory of Middle-Age Italy—the schools of great painters. He was a man of enormous and original power, of deep religious feeling, of literary instinct ; he was a friend of Dante, and emerges in the middle of the thirteenth century, as a giant of artistic force and tenderness, leaving his mark everywhere behind him in Italy. But the important point to remember is this, that he was inspired by St. Francis. But for the life, the unique and beautiful life, of that extraordinary man, Italian art, to which Europe has ever since owed so much, might indeed have existed, but it would have had a different temper and a different range.

The striking thing about Giotto was this, that he possessed in himself just what was wanting in his predecessors, (1) life ; (2) the knowledge of grouping. All before him, even Cimabue himself, were still the victims of a stiff Byzantine manner. Their pictures are great and religious as we can see to this day, but they are stiff and conventional. It is tradition and usage and precedent that rule in them ; Giotto had the daring to bring *life*, that free play of real thought and feeling and varying emotion, which makes such short work of rules and theories, and is individual and true like nature and nature's God. In the same way, in Giotto's grouping there is naturalness and reality, although there is none of that "middlingness" which is the destruction of all the merely modern attempts at painting. This naturally came from Giotto's own genius, but the first inspiration came from the great saint of the century. Giotto may be said to

■ have written the poem of St. Francis on the walls of the
■ church of Assisi.

■ Above the high altar in the lower church are his
■ celebrated frescoes of the triumphs of St. Francis, but
■ it has been truly said, that whilst he represented his
■ youth and vocation, the renunciation of his paternal
■ heritage, all the more important details of his life—nothing
■ is so truly touching as the sketch of his marriage with
■ Holy Poverty. In this there is not a touch of the old
■ stiff Greek manner ; the thought of the great saint's
■ entire self-renunciation, of his calm and joyful acceptance
■ of the hardest things for the love of Christ, fired the great
■ painter, and everything in the fresco is “new and free and
■ inspired !”* Giotto also, in a touching manner, painted
■ his death.

The then new and famous school of Italian painting, which filled all Italy, was due to Giotto. Giotto himself carried on his own marvellous work at Pisa, at Padua, at Naples, at Avignon ; there, and elsewhere, he not only left magnificent schools and great paintings but he taught men new truths, or rather old truths in a new and more living manner. After him and from him came Cavallini, Taddeo Gaddi, Puccio Capanna, all of whom show, amidst the great variety of their compositions, a deep, chaste, restrained, supernatural tone in their “Annunciations,” in their “Nativities,” in their “Crucifixions,” which makes us feel that their eyes had been opened to another world in a way that had not been the case among their predecessors.

And who was he that opened that door in heaven ? And who was he that gave that fresh life and thought ? Who but the man who had brought down in his own person the living Christ into his century, who had taught men

* Ozanam, *Les Poètes Franciscains*, p. 97.

again the love of God, and then the love of man and the love of Nature; who had swept the violence and wickedness of feudalism—for the time being, at least—off the face of the earth; who had lifted the people out of their misery and degradation, and awakened the Church out of its stiffness and worldliness—it was he, too, who inspired, who may almost be said to have created, Italian art—the great St. Francis? Such are the deep, such are the penetrating, such are the far-reaching effects of sanctity!

The same influence was felt even beyond the school; Orcagna, especially in his great paintings, now also, I think, altogether disappeared in Santa Croce, and in the wonderful work he has left behind him still visible at Orvieto, is filled with the Franciscan spirit. The same is true of Fra Angelico;* in his *Last Judgment* in the Belle Arti in Florence, in his apparition of St. Francis at the Chapter House of Arles, and in the striking figure of the saint in the great "Crucifixion" in St. Mark's at Florence, the same extraordinary inspiration is evident.

But as a fact, St. Francis had laid his hand upon art; Botticelli, Ghirlandajo, Crevelli, Alonso Cano, Signorelli at Orvieto, Perugino, in a hundred places, Pinturicchio—all were moved by the same idea. Later, at Florence, when Paganism was reasserting itself in the most godless forms of the Renaissance, Savonarola—Dominican as he was—was moved by the thought of St. Francis, and deeply touched by his freedom of spirit, and no ideal portrait of St. Francis is more filled with the combination of his tenderness and his strength than the fine portrait of him which is due to the genius of Fra Bartolommeo. In modern times men of the most different tempers have

* He has Giotto's gifts and power, together with infinite tenderness.

been forced to acknowledge the greatness of his character and no better work has been done by Flandrin in St. Vincent de Paul in Paris, than his treatment of this saint. But again the point for all of us is, the unity of Nature and Religion and Art, and how much the world owes to a great saint like St. Francis, not only for his direct influence upon religion but his indirect influence upon those fields of human effort which so much adorn life, and especially so wide and wonderful a field as the art of the Middle Ages.

I

We do well to consider the question of painting. If we go back to Assisi itself it is more possible to understand all this. The city to this day lends itself to the most beautiful visions ; in approaching it the traveller passes along the valley and through the plain, where the wealth of vine, of olive, of corn gives opportunity for the scenes of the richest Italy. The high hill on which it stands, jutting out from the surrounding Apennines projects into, almost overhangs, the valley. In modern days the city perched upon the crags is approached by zig-zags, and the hill itself in its front escarpments is made more abrupt by the arches, in terraces, which support the huge monastery and church of St. Francis. Beyond these the eye rests on the tower of Santa Chiara, which marks the grave of that gentle saint. Down in the valley, and close to what is now the railway station, rise the great pile of the church and the surrounding buildings of Santa Maria degli Angeli ; these suffered in an earthquake in 1832, but were restored immediately,

and the cupola itself was not injured. Nothing marks the effect of St. Francis on art more than the contrast between this magnificent church and the little shed of the Portiuncula in which St. Francis and his first companions found their insufficient shelter.

That little shed—now a chapel long loved and revered—stands in the interior of the church; over the entrance to it is a fine fresco by Overbeck, representing the vision of St. Francis when he heard the voice reminding him of the greatness of evangelical poverty. The original building of the Portiuncula has been preserved with wonderful care, almost intact; behind it, there is a fresco of Perugino's. Near this, there is another little chapel, built by St. Bonaventura, over the cell in which St. Francis died. There are pictures here by Lo Spagna, and in the sacristy, close by, a fine picture of the Saviour by Perugino. There is also a chapel over the cave where St. Francis meditated and did penance; there are many paintings here of extreme beauty by Tiberio d'Assisi, and in the church itself there is a fine altar-piece by Luca della Robbia. Even Santa Maria degli Angeli, with all its severity, shows the immense effect of the Franciscan spirit upon Italian art.

But it is in Assisi itself that this is more than ever placed in evidence. There are works of interest in the cathedral, in the Chiesa Nuova—built on the site of the original house of St. Francis—and of the church of Santa Chiara, in which latter are some frescoes by Giottino. But it is in the great church of St. Francis that all this is made clear. "All artists of renown," says Rio, "have prostrated themselves in succession, and have left on the walls of the sanctuary the pious tribute of their pencil." The artists from all parts of Italy—especially, Siena,

Perugia, and Arezzo—and the greatest of the Florentines all came. Benozzo Gozzoli, and Orcagna, and Perugino, and Raphael, besides the older ones—all these found exercise for their genius under the inspiration of St. Francis.

But it is in the lower church that are the most interesting remnants of the past. There are beautiful paintings here by Simone Memmi, especially in the chapel of St. Martin; there is some work also by his nephew, Fra Martino, but it is what remains of the work of Giotto that makes the place famous as a home of art. He is said to have caught his inspiration from Dante; he represented here the fundamental virtues of the soul's life. First, there is holy chastity, represented as a maiden in a tower, praying, while angels present her with a palm branch and a sacred book. Two warriors are represented ready to defend the fortress. Baptism is received close by, the baptism of Chastity, and St. Francis receives disciples, while a winged Penance, bearing a scourge, drives away lower vices. Next to this comes holy Obedience. She is robed in black, and accompanied by Prudence and Humility; she places a yoke upon the kneeling figure of a monk, whilst the scene is contemplated by St. Francis, attended by angels. Next, and last, there is holy Poverty; she is attended by Hope and Charity, while she is wedded to St. Francis. She is "in the guise of a woman, very beautiful, but with emaciated face and torn garments; a dog barks at her, and two children throw stones and place brambles in her path. She calmly and joyfully holds out her hand to St. Francis. Christ himself unites the spouses. In the midst of clouds is seen the Almighty, accompanied by angels, as though heaven and earth were both assisting at the marriage of these two poor ones."*

* Ozanam, *Les Poètes Franciscains*, p. 97.

The idea of this chief subject of all was in all probability suggested by Dante's lines in Canto XI. of the Paradiso. In the remaining compartment there is what is called Gloriosus Franciscus. Here the saint is himself in glory, surrounded by angels ; above his head is a banner bearing the cross and seven stars.

Such are the great works of Giotto, which, even in their faded glories, give an immense interest to the lower church of Assisi. No one can look at them now unmoved, or wander on the hillside to the west of the little city, with the rugged rocks above one's head, and beneath one's feet the rich carpets of cyclamen, and before one's eyes long dreamy stretches of the landscape of Umbria, without being touched by the feeling of that beautiful and loving life devoted to God and man and nature in utter truth, and which therefore left such an impress on Christian art. Truly "a thing of beauty is a joy for ever."

II

Literature is the expression of the thoughts of mankind in the most natural and the most permanent way. Great as poetry is, permanent as is its power, it is also very often the expression of the childhood of the race. Those more simple and direct impressions of things which are observable in a child are also observable in the childhood of the race. Often in great crises of history men fly to poetry to express their strong and solemn feelings on national glory, and also to express their deep thoughts and sorrows when things are not going well. The enthusiasm, the genius, the devotion of St. Francis, his

position as one who gathered up and consecrated the best thoughts of his time, made him a spring and source of poetry. This is evident from three examples, and to these we may direct our attention.

The close of the thirteenth century—the time when St. Francis was gone—was a time of crisis in the history of Europe. A great change had passed over men's minds. Two leading facts had been prominent until then: first, the Crusades; secondly, the long struggle between the Empire and the Papacy. Both had turned upon noble ideas; both had had a kind of religious consecration. Now they were practically over. The spirit of St. Bernard was dead. With St. Louis died the Crusades. There had been much about them which was chimerical and mistaken, but they had represented a noble enthusiasm. In cold days like our own, when Christendom can stand in diplomatic restraint to superintend the cruelties of the worst of all earthly tyrannies, we ought to do justice to the—it may be mistaken—energy and devotion of a Christendom which may have been more fanatical, but was certainly not so callous. As to the Guelph and Ghibelline struggle, each side was inspired by something of a noble idea. The Ghibellines had a sense of the greatness of the Empire and the long tradition of Roman rule and law. The Guelphs were inspired with a noble thought at once of national unity and the sacredness of the Church. The imperial power had received a fatal blow in the person of Frederick II. The great line of Pontiffs closed with Innocent IV. Now struggles did not indeed cease, but it became less and less a question of doctrine or principle, and more and more a question of interests. The lowering influence of things was felt in the schools. And the loftier spirits retired more into

themselves, sought consolation for evil times in religion or secluded thought. Poetry was then the expression of sorrow or the pathetic representation of the memory of a better time. Among the people there was much of the ardent religion kindled in them by St. Francis, and their prophets were the real supports of literature and handed on the divine torch.

The most remarkable literary figure filled with the Franciscan inspiration was Jacopone da Todi. He was born in the little city of Todi, on the borders of Umbria, in the earlier half of the thirteenth century. In some ways his career was not without its resemblance to that of St. Francis. He was gifted and attractive, made progress in such learning as the schools of his time could afford. At the University of Bologna he threw himself into the wild and undisciplined life of the students. On taking his doctor's degree in law he showed the ability and the extravagance in display not uncommon at the time. His career as a lawyer was not unsullied by chicanery, and he seems to have been excessively unscrupulous, and to have made his own fortune at the expense of others. His worldly prosperity was crowned by a happy and wealthy marriage. His wife had riches and beauty, virtue and high birth. In the year 1268 her life came to a tragic end by the fall of a stage erected for spectators during some public games at Todi. On her death, her husband discovered that beneath her splendid clothing she was in the habit of wearing hair-cloth—a mark of penance for his sins, which she had concealed from all but God.

This produced a violent change in Jacopone's view of things. His vehement, poetic, undisciplined nature, subjected to a great shock, could not face life with

equanimity. He behaved in a wild and eccentric manner; acted like a madman, and shocked even an age not unused to eccentricities. He became one of the Third Order of St. Francis, but this did not satisfy his longings. He plunged into the wildest theological speculations, and for ten years was a prey to varying and unsatisfying and unsupported conclusions. In 1278 he asked to be received as a Franciscan. The brotherhood were not unnaturally shy of committing themselves to this eccentric novice. They put him off from time to time. At length he is said to have convinced them at once of his sanity and his steadiness of purpose by two smalls poems, one in Latin, one in Italian. He was received. In many ways he gave proof that if he was extravagant or enthusiastic, it was the Christian enthusiasm and extravagance of St. Paul and St. Francis. His pride was gone, and in all things he showed a very deep and true humility. The memory of his past sins led him to the deepest penitence. To us it may seem that some of his efforts for overcoming the rebellions of nature were excessive. They were certainly sincere. The time came when this extraordinary man—who might have expected that his severer battles had ended, and that in the cloister was peace—was to find that the Church on earth is herself a place of trial—if divine, also human—and full of disappointing surprises.

A division, as we know, had already shown itself in the ranks of the Franciscans. Some—with the temper of Brother Elias—were for relaxing the rule; others for returning to its original strictness. In 1294, Celestine V.—the hermit Pietro Morrone—ascended the papal throne. He was entirely on the side of the rigorists, as was natural—as, of course, was Jacopone—and authorised their living

according to the original rule.* Five months on the throne of St. Peter was enough for the recluse, and he abandoned the cares which were too heavy for him and was succeeded by the celebrated Boniface VIII.

Boniface VIII. was a statesman, and he seems to have been a man of violent temper and unbending resolution. Jacopone was deeply distressed at his revocation of the decree of Celestine V. and his order for the "spiritual" Franciscans to live under the rule of the "conventuals." When the Colonna Cardinals declared against the Pope, Jacopone allowed himself to be mixed up in the matter, and in consequence was included in the excommunication aimed at them. For some time he remained in a "spiritual" convent at Palestrina under the protection of the Colonna, and there composed some of his poetical lamentations on the sorrows of the Church, some of which were used with effect, for their own purposes, by the enemies of Boniface.

In 1298, Palestrina was taken by Boniface. Jacopone was thrown, chained, into a miserable dungeon. His indomitable spirit accepted the terrible trials of his imprisonment as God's just punishment for his sins, and the fruits of his imprisonment are some of his most beautiful spiritual poems. Appeal after appeal was made by him to the inexorable Pope in vain. It was not until 1303, when Boniface was dead, after his overthrow by the Colonna, that the excommunication was removed by Benedict XI. Jacopone ended his days in the convent of the Friars Minor at Collazione. It had been a strange life—one of

* Cf. Jacopone da Todi, Satire xv. Much was evidently expected from Celestine by really earnest men like Jacopone; and bitter was their disappointment when he retired from the Papal throne.

Dante, *Inferno* iii. 60, probably alludes to Celestine's retirement—Dante could never pardon weakness.

great sorrows and great suffering, but, to the end, that burning soul preserved its capacity for poetry, and its capacity for loving. Some of his most moving spiritual poems were written during this brief space of rest. He fell ill towards the end of 1306. The touching story is told how he declined to have the last sacraments except from the hands of his beloved friend Giovanni d'Alvernia ; how—drawn by some interior attraction to his friend—Giovanni came, how from him he received the last rites of the Church, and chanted with his last breath the song, "*Jesu, nostra fidanza.*" He died at midnight on Christmas Eve, 1306.*

He is remarkable for many things. He was mixed up, indeed, with violent religious dissensions, and shared the sorrows of his time ; but he was remarkable for his penitence for sin which was overwhelming, and for his love of God which was pushed to the utmost limits of human effort. He was also a true poet. His poetry—this is what should be remembered—drew its inspiration from that sunshine of utter love of God and man, which St. Francis had revived in the world and in the Church. His poems spread through the mountains of Umbria, and were real channels of spiritual blessing to the poor of that land of St. Francis. Whatever faults may have been committed by Jacopone from the vehemences of his nature, were atoned for by the depth of his penitence, and he has been recognised by the Church under the title of "Blessed." In the church of St. Fortunatus at Todi, in 1596, the following epitaph was placed to his memory by order of the bishop : "Here lie the bones of the Blessed Jacopone de' Beneditti da Todi, Friar Minor, who having gone mad with love of Christ,

* Ozanam, *Les Poètes Franciscains*, chap. iv. pp. 151-190.

by a new artifice deceived the world and took heaven by violence."*

Jacopone was, probably, one of the very first who drew out of the whole theory of Christianity, not only the solemnities of dogma, but the beauty and touching charm that belong to the Christian religion. It is true said, that he produced no longer mere lessons but songs. Sooner or later, in dealing with religion, we are confronted with mysteries, and, thinking on these, we struggle up through the darkness towards the source of all things. The nearer we approach to what is true, the nearer also we touch on what is beautiful. Jacopone did this. He anticipated, in a sense, Dante, for he touched on those great problems which his mighty successor penetrated; he felt—to do justice to an idea of a great writer—that in the spiritual Paradise the first Beatitude is to know, but the second and the greatest is to love.

There is a certain likeness between Jacopone and Dante: they both suffered; they were both cruelly treated; they were both disabused of any illusions which the world might give them; they both submitted to the condition of the time, whether as to the empire or the Papacy; but they each spoke the severest truth about both the one and the other, and they both suffered accordingly; they both had the eye and the heart of poets, and the fearless courage of great thinkers and the unshaken faith of strong Christians; they were both powerful—although at an immense distance of course—in literature, and they both owed, at the bottom of all things, much of their inspiration to St. Francis.

* Wadding, *Ann. Min.*, anno 1306. The actual words are, "Osse B. Jacoponi de Benedictis Tudortini, Fr. Ordinis Minorum, qui stultus propter Christum nova mundum arte delusus, et cœlum rapuit."

Jacopone is essentially a poet of the people. He speaks the very dialect of Umbria; he is the rough predecessor of Dante, for Dante, although he understood the language of Virgil and Ovid, had learnt from Jacopone how great it was and how wise it was, to speak in the language "understood of the people." Amongst the earlier effects of the influence of St. Francis on literature, there is none more remarkable than the work of Jacopone da Todi.*

It is also to be remembered that a real contribution to literature from the spirit and work of St. Francis is to be found in the "Fioretti di San Francesco," or "Little Flowers of St. Francis." These are said to have been written by one Giovanni di San Lorenzo, of the noble family of the Marignolle, who became Bishop of Bisignano in 1534. This I do not believe. There is not real evidence for it and it rests wholly upon conjecture. I am entirely of opinion with Ozanam that no one can say that such a book as this has an author. The "Fioretti" is unquestionably, and by internal evidence, a collection of the beautiful traditions with regard to St. Francis, to be found in the mountains of Umbria. The simple people of that region had before their minds the splendid picture of that wonderful man, who seemed to have broken all the mere ties which bind men to earth, to have reproduced in himself more nearly than others the life and likeness of Christ, and yet with more statesmanlike capacity than that of statesmen, to have entered into the sorrows and needs of the people. Men repeated the story of his life and work, and remembered the incidents reported as to his first companions, and while the story passed from mouth to mouth, that deep sense of poetry in the heart of a

* Jacopone was the composer of the *Stabat Mater*.

people illuminated the story, so that, if possibly sometimes not true in letter, it is certainly true in spirit.

The language of the "Fioretti" is incomparably beautiful, because incomparably simple ; it possesses that sweetness and charm—in so far as human compositions can have them—which belong to the Gospels. The stories they record may seem at first sight poetical and legendary, but they always mean something which is real and strong ; there is nothing about them of the maudlin type which is occasionally met with in the later legends of the Roman saints. "You may smile if you like," as it has been said, "at the narrative of the peace which the saint made between the town of Gubbio and the wolf of the neighbouring mountain ; well, you are failing to see an admirable lesson of charity given to righteous persons in favour of poor sinners. You do not perceive that the wolf, thief and homicide as he is, but docile after all, who places his paw in St. Francis' hand, and who keeps his promise to do no ill to any one, is an excellent representative of the people of the Middle Age, terrible in their wild impulses, but of whom the Church never despaired, whose murderous hands she took in her divine hands, until she inspired them with that horror of blood, which is the most beautiful and incontestable characteristic of modern morality."*

But besides that, there is undoubtedly in the "Fioretti" a great deal of real history, and a large number of real and most instructive facts worked up by the power of popular poetry. Those who wish to enter into the highest thoughts of the people of Scotland, have to read the songs of the Cavaliers, and the spirit of them reproduced by Walter Scott ; those who wish to understand the

* Ozanam, *Les Poètes Franciscains*, p. 265.

depth of the English nature have to study our old national songs and the plays of Shakespeare ; those who wish to appreciate the romance of the Irish character must read the Irish Melodies of Thomas Moore, bringing into modern life the old spirit of the Irish clans ; those who would know the better side of Spanish chivalry must study some of the earlier ballad poetry of Spain ; and those who would enter into the immense impulse given to life and art by so great a character as St. Francis—an impulse which, because it acted upon the deepest things, acted upon the life, and therefore the literature of the people—must read the “Fioretti,” which, whether they were collected by Giovanni di San Lorenzo or not, are no work of the sixteenth century, but a poetical statement in the language of the people, of the great movement of the thirteenth century and its greatest Christian hero.*

There can be little doubt that Dante himself—the greatest of Italian poets, probably the greatest of all poets—was greatly influenced, amidst his multifarious acquirements, by the Franciscan literature. When he was still young Santa Croce had been raised by the Minorites in Florence as a splendid memorial to their founder. Dante would probably have heard from the Friars Minor many of those “Fioretti” which were collected, as we have seen, at a later time. The student of the *Paradiso* is well aware of how thoroughly interested he was in the Franciscan movement. He is quite alive to the fact of the different tendencies that were setting in, even during the lifetime of St. Francis, one laxer and the other more strict, as to the observance of the rule. The laxer view arose

* Sabatier—far the best modern biographer of St. Francis—attaches much importance to them. No one who really studies the sources of information at our disposal can do otherwise.

from the influence of Brother Elias ; Dante must have been well aware of this, as is evident from his references to the Order and to their troubles. If, as has been thought,* the Dominican ideal was more in accordance with his mind than the Franciscan, still the influence of St. Francis can be traced on a mind so large as Dante's. He writes an elaborate and loving description of Assisi itself : he immortalises Bernard of Quintevelle, St. Francis' first disciple, and Egidio, also one of the early disciples, and Illuminato, who was St. Francis' companion in Egypt, and Agostino who, it is said, died just at the same time as St. Francis, and accompanied him to heaven. Dante was also well acquainted with the writings of St. Bonaventura as he was with the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, and there is no doubt that he caught the spirit and inspiration of one as he did of the other. In this way, as in many other ways, St. Francis directly and indirectly influenced the literature of the time, during his life and after his death.†

III

It is still more remarkable to notice what immense influence St. Francis had upon theology and upon Christian thought generally. He had had such an enthusiasm for influencing men's lives, by devoted lives, that he did not at first encourage anything like learning. The first Franciscan school for teaching theology was established after great hesitation on St. Francis' part, owing to the general

* By Dr. Liddon, *Essays*.

† *Paradiso*, cantos xi. and xii. 130, &c.

desire amongst the brethren that there should be more exact training in theology to enable Franciscan preachers to meet the needs of the time and the arguments of the heretics. Anthony, afterwards known as St. Anthony of Padua, was placed at the head of it ; he showed extraordinary ability, and the school became celebrated. Anthony in his humility broke off his own lectures for a time to attend those of a celebrated Frenchman, Thomas Gallo, who had been taught at the Abbey of St. Victor in Paris and who was lecturing at Vercelli. Anthony afterwards was sent into France, and so great was his success in preaching and teaching that he was called the Hammer of the Heretics.

As a matter of fact therefore, one who, like St. Francis, had laid such especial stress upon poverty and simplicity, became a spring of theological learning. The first of the great doctors of the Franciscans was St. Bonaventura, but besides him, there are other great names well known in the world of theology and learning. There is Alexander of Hales, an Englishman, a native of Gloucestershire, who studied in Paris, became a professor and doctor in philosophy, and joined the Franciscan Order in 1222. He studied the Arabians and Aristotle, and used them in defence of the Faith : he wrote an important *Summa*, which, in fact, led the way to the works of Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, and he was the teacher of St. Bonaventura.

Then there was the great Roger Bacon, Doctor Mirabilis as he was called, born 1219 and died in 1292. He was an Englishman, a native of Somersetshire, and went to Oxford and became the friend of the celebrated Grosseteste, who afterwards became Bishop of Lincoln. He anticipated in a marvellous manner more modern forms

of learning : he studied mathematics, and optics and medicine, as well as Arabic and Greek. He stands alone in his age as a great experimental philosopher and scientific man, which brought upon him the suspicion many of his contemporaries and especially the members of the Order, and in spite of the protection extended him by Clement IV. as long as that Pope lived, he suffered from a running fire of persecution.

Then there was a celebrated Duns Scotus, probably born in 1274. He was an Englishman also and Northumbrian ; he spent almost his entire life at Oxford passing just a few years towards the end of his life in Paris, and being sent to Cologne after that, for the purpose of lecturing, but really reaching it or dying in time to die. He had wonderful boldness and originality, and probably paved the way for the downfall of Scholasticism in the following generation. There were a number of other great Franciscans besides the remarkable men, and the Order may be almost said to have founded, and certainly for a long time possessed the University of Oxford.

It was thus that from small beginnings great things followed, and art and literature and theology, and even science, owed an immense debt to the simple and devout life of St. Francis of Assisi.

It is quite impossible to close the life of such a man without remembering how wonderful are the ways of God.

If a soul is, by divine grace, given up *wholly* to God it is impossible for us to say to what heights it may attain, or what good, in every region of human effort, it may do.

To have an entire devotion to objects not of this world is not usual, but where it exists, it is of imperial power. The Christian Church in many ways has been a deep disappointment. In one thing it has not disappointed us. It has never entirely lost hold of the splendid idea of the consecrated life ; it has never forgotten that the highest ideal is entire self-surrender to God. Always *some* men have felt the directness of the call, and the need of utter self-abandonment. *They* have been the leaders of men ; *they* have been the salt of the earth ; *they* have made religion a reality. Among them, after St. Paul, is no more moving, elevating, touching example than St. Francis of Assisi.



A P P E N D I X I

THE STIGMATA

THE interesting question as to the stigmata in the case of St. Francis resolves itself mainly into two considerations :

1. Had the saint these marks upon his body ?
2. If so, were they miraculous ?

1. The two questions have not infrequently, in modern times, been confused, and in consequence the *fact* of the stigmata has been denied, chiefly on *a priori* grounds—i.e., on the assumption that we know everything, and that among other items of knowledge we possess this, viz., that miracles are impossible, or if once possible (as the more piously inclined would allow) in Our Lord's time, they are impossible now.

It is well, if we are to think philosophically and historically, to be rid of this confusion, and to treat one thing at a time.

Whether or not these marks did appear on the body of St. Francis is a question of *evidence*.

(a) The arguments *against* the fact are :

- (1) The extraordinary haste (so it is said) of the obsequies of St. Francis, as he was buried the day after his death.
- (2) The concealment (so it is said) of his body from the eyes of witnesses, by being placed, contrary to custom, in a coffin.
- (3) The violent ways adopted at the translation of the

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body, and the fact that the place of burial after translation was not known for centuries.

(4) The fact that no mention is made of the stigmata in the Bull of Canonisation.

These arguments against the fact—which are all of which I am aware—run up really into the supposition that Brother Elias, for purposes of his own, invented the whole story.

Per contra :

- (1) In Italy generally, as commonly in hot countries, the habit of early burial prevails. In the Middle Ages this was especially the case—e.g., Innocent III. died at Perugia, July 16, 1216, buried the next day; Honorius III. died March 18, 1227, buried the next day.
- (2) If not enclosed in a coffin, the body would probably have been seized upon and broken up for relics (e.g. the case of St. Elizabeth of Hungary).*
- (3) The extraordinary conduct of Brother Elias with regard to the translation was probably due to the fear of an attempt on the part of the Perugians to possess themselves of the body; against such an attempt he had had, as has been seen, to take precautions even during the life of St. Francis.
- (4) The silence of the Bull is no argument where there is positive evidence. The Bull is an address and a command; it has no pretence to be an accurate historical statement.

The idea that the whole story arose from an invention of Brother Elias is inadmissible, for, if so, why did he choose as his associates in his fraud, Brothers Angelo, Leo, and Ruffinus, the men, above all, entirely opposed to him?

(b) The evidence for the fact is direct, and, I think, overwhelming.

* *Liber de dictis iv. ancillarum.* Mencken, tom. ii. p. 2032, quoted by Sabatier, p. 410.

(1) *Immediately* upon the death of St. Francis, A.D. 1226, Brother Elias, as Vicar-General, states the fact to the whole Order.*

Denials which came from opponents—the Bishop of Olmutz and others, and the Dominicans—arose evidently from jealousy or rivalry. They do not appear before A.D. 1237, and even then could easily have been confirmed by living witnesses, but nothing of the kind was done.

(2) Brother Leo gives the account simply and clearly in his note to St. Francis' Benediction, as to the authenticity of which there can be no doubt.† Also he speaks to Peter of Tewkesbury on the subject, telling him of the vision, and saying that there was much more to tell than had been told. His conversation was taken down from his own lips by Brother Garynus of Sedenefeld.‡

(3) Thomas of Celano gives a full account as early as 1230. He does not profess to be an eye-witness, but relates fully what was held by the Order.§

(4) Gregory IX., as early as 1237, bears his testimony. The Bull *Confessor Domini* urges to belief in the stigmata. In later Bulls he takes the same line. He certainly had every means of knowing.||

(5) Alexander IV., in the Bull *Benigna Operatio* in A.D. 1255, declares his own knowledge of St. Francis, when he was domestic prelate of the then Cardinal Ugolino, and here and in other Bulls asserts the truth of the stigmata.¶

(6) St. Bonaventura, in 1260, asserts the fact, but his testimony chiefly rests on Thomas of Celano, though there are additions which may have been legendary, or may have come from accounts of contemporaries.

* Wadding, *Ann. Min.*, vol. i. anno 1226, 44. *Acta Sanct.* vol. ii. Oct., pp. 668-9. † Celano, *Vita Secunda*, 2-18.

‡ *Monumenta Franciscana*. Eccleston, *De Adventu Min.*, Collatio xii. pp. 51, 52. § Celano, *Vita Prima*, 94, 95, 112. || Potthast, 10,307-8-9. ¶ Ibid. 16077.

(7) In Berlinghieri's likeness of St. Francis (referred to above) of A.D. 1236, the stigmata appear.

(8) The strongest testimony of all, to my mind, is the witness of Brother Boniface. When John of Parma Minister-General of the Order, asked him to tell the brethren in the Chapter-General at Genoa as to the stigmata, his answer was: "These sinful eyes have seen them, and these sinful hands have touched them."* Brother Boniface seems to have been a very good man, and no one has ever hinted a doubt as to his veracity.

2. Supposing the stigmata to be a *fact*, was the fact *miraculous*? The difficulty in dealing with this arm of the question arises from the uncertainty of the modern mind as to what is meant by *miracle*.

The following considerations are worth our attention :

(1) No real believer in God can well doubt that, whilst He conducts the affairs of His own world in a way so orderly and regulated that we are able to observe the fact, still—if He be God, and since He is God—there must be occasions when He may see fit to conduct them in a manner, not indeed disorderly or unregulated, but such as we are not accustomed to. "Miracles" are therefore possible, and in some cases probable.

(2) The "scientific" temper of our times—in one aspect so excellent, in another little else than a modern form of superstition—dislikes the idea of divine "interference." Well, there are remarkable facts, once called "miraculous"—in the extreme sense—which we can now account for. They are not less the expression of God's will, because we may be better able than our forefathers to see *how* they may have come about.

In regard to the question before us :

It is quite possible that the mind *may* have affected the body.

(a) St. Francis' whole life and mind were wrapped up in the thought of the divine charity shown in the Passion of Christ.

* *Monumenta Franciscana*. Eccleston, *De Adventu Min.*, Collatio xii. p. 51.

- (b) The force of the concentrated meditation of a great saint, and its possible effect on the body, is a thing scarcely possible to realise by ordinary people like ourselves.
- (c) At the time of St. Francis' retreat at La Vernia, his mind was filled with the thought of the Archangel Michael, and of the Passion of Our Lord.
- (d) It is remarkable that in the case of the stigmata of St. Francis, the record of the wounds is not like that of other cases (whether hysterical or not, such, e.g., as the modern one which I myself examined of Louise Lateau in Belgium). In these cases there are bleeding wounds. In St. Francis' case all agree that they presented the appearance of nails—the heads on the upper surface of hands and feet, the points apparently bent by a hammer on the other surface. Only in the side was an open wound.

I conclude :

- (1) That there can be no reasonable doubt of the *fact* of the stigmata.
- (2) That they were in the true sense of the word *miraculous*—i.e., permitted by Almighty God to His faithful servant, by whatever means, as a closer approximation to his Divine Master, and a witness to his sanctity.

N.B.¹—The strongest form of the case against the stigmata is put by Karl Hase, *Franz v. Assisi*, Leipzig, 1856.

N.B.²—Sabatier, in his Appendix on the stigmata, *Vie de St. Francois d'Assise*, takes, I find, my view. He gives further evidence, but that I have not referred to, as I have only brought forward what I have myself examined, and what has met me in my reading on the subject.

This excellent writer decides *against* the thing being miraculous on the astonishing ground that belief in miracles weakens manliness and morality, for that if God “intervenes” in this way in the affairs of men, He is guilty of favouritism, and His servants become mere courtiers looking for favours! This grotesque argument would carry us at once into endless difficulties.

Still Sabatier's dislike to miracles, and his absurd argument against a miracle, make his adherence to the truth of the stigmata as a *fact* all the more valuable from my point of view.

He believes in matters which pass our ordinary experience. He agrees as to the existence of "the unheard-of," "the unexpected," &c., in life, provided that "this new notion (!) of the supernatural" be excluded.

We need not fight about words. If it comforts the "scientific" mind to acknowledge "the unheard-of," "the unexpected," &c., in life, a believer in God may well be satisfied that a real step is taken towards truth, towards what *he* calls miracle, and towards the very *old* "notion of the supernatural." M. Paul Sabatier has done such excellent work for a fuller elucidation of the life of St Francis in some points, and has shown himself honest and open-minded in the examination of evidence, that I am far too full of admiration for him—though I have only recently seen his excellent book—and agree with his conclusion in too many instances, to dwell upon such a divergence in nomenclature as the above. My own belief is that the more careful the evidence is examined and due weight given to probability the more clearly the "miracle" (as I should call it) or the "unusual fact" (as M. Paul Sabatier would call it) is satisfactorily established.

APPENDIX II

THE RULE AND THE LAST TESTAMENT OF ST. FRANCIS

I. THERE is a certain amount of doubt as to the Rule of the Franciscan Order.

On the whole, it appears that St. Francis drew up a rule in A.D. 1209 or 1210. It is by no means evident that the rule mentioned under the latter year by Wadding is the rule of that year.

Again, there seems to have been a rule in 1221, and finally—the final rule, which received the Pope's approbation—in 1223.

Sabatier—with whose excellent book I have only become acquainted when these sheets were almost through the press—thinks that no man was less fitted to draw up a rule than St. Francis.*

This statement is intelligible, but it contains an exaggeration. A man of wide views and of large ideas is, it is true, not the man to frame a narrow rule. On the other hand, powerful and permanent rules *grow*. “Paper constitutions” are always ineffectual and even foolish. In the best sense of the word, St. Francis was, I think, the man to draw up a final rule, because he had patience and acted upon experience. The final rule may have been modified or assisted by the Pope, but no one who carefully examines it can doubt that it was the work of the great Saint himself. It is the concentrated result of his experience and his convictions.

* “Jamais homme n'a été moins capable que François de faire une règle.”—*Vie de S. François d'Assise*, p. 289.

II. The last testament of St. Francis is interesting. In his death he left, very distinctly, his thoughts and wishes of his Order.*

There can be no doubt that St. Francis had a very great influence on the spirit of *relaxation* so favoured by Brother Elias. In his last testament he is distinct, almost stern.

This testament is further interesting, however, because it reveals St. Francis' character. There is in it evidence of deep humility and his real strength.

Strangely enough, Gregory IX. declared that the brothers of the Order were not bound to obey St. Francis' last will in his testament. None the less, in it the Saint showed his ordinary common sense and his prescience as to the dangers of the future. Had his rule and his testament been more closely observed, the future of the Order might have been very different. The important point to us, however, is that these two documents place us so entirely *en rapport* with that strong and benevolent character.

* Cf. Wadding, *Annales Min.*, anno 1226, xxxv. The text is to be found in the Bull *Quo elongati* of Gregory IX. 1230, and elsewhere.

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